

# Jakub Bromberg

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Lodz

Poland

Interviewer: Judyta Hajduk

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I met with Mr. Bromberg several times in his house on Prochnika Street in Lodz, where we spent many hours talking. With time Mr. Bromberg changed from a serious and dignified man, to a witty and enthusiastic interlocutor. As he admitted himself, he couldn't wait for our next meeting. Mr. Bromberg currently lives alone. He is an elderly, sick man. Yet, despite all his illnesses, he has a very positive attitude to people and to the world. In addition, he is also a very well-read man, who likes to know everything. His apartment is practically layered with magazines and books. Reading is Mr. Bromberg's greatest passion and, unfortunately, the only entertainment he has. Mr. Bromberg often digresses in his story: he gladly elaborates side plots and he keeps multiplying chains of anecdotes.

My family came from Bodzentyn [139 km from Lodz], in the Swietokrzyskie Mountains. Bodzentyn was a very small town. There were several hundred Jews living there [approx. 1,000 Jews, about two percent of the total population]. Artisans, merchants – the entire downtown was Jewish. Jews and Poles lived together in the city and the relationships between them were very good. There were more Poles. The Jews were progressive, but mostly practiced religion – the older ones at least; the younger were starting to assimilate a bit. When you walked on the street without wearing a cap, you stood out at once. There was an elementary school in Bodzentyn – a Polish one, I attended it as well – a teachers' training college, a prayer house and a mikveh. The owner of the mikveh was called Binsztok. The mikveh was on Kielecka Street. The prayer house was next to the Catholic church, on Boznicza Street. And there was also a cemetery, on a hill. When I went to Bodzentyn right after the war, this Jewish cemetery was still there, but all the mazelot had been destroyed. [Editor's note: according to the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies – Cemetery Project report, the Jewish cemetery still exists in Bodzentyn. Before World War II the cemetery was approx. two hectares, but now is only about one hectare. 20 to 100 tombstones are visible in the original locations with 50 to 75 percent toppled or broken.] And there was only one grave which was left, also falling apart a bit. This was my grandfather's friend's grave. He was a Jew, an old man, a highly respected person in town; he had a Requests and Applications Office. His name was Lajder Chmielnicki. I don't remember when and how he died.

I don't remember my grandparents at all. I only know, because my parents told me, that Father's father was Moszek Majer [Bromberg]. Mother's parents were Jankiel Wajntraub and Estera Wajntraub [nee Baumel]. I only knew one grandmother. I think she was Father's mother. She came from Bodzentyn near Kielce. Her maiden name was Golebiewska; she had a purely Polish last name. I only remember that she was an old woman, she used to sit in a wheelchair or a regular chair and she'd always be sewing, making something. She'd often call me to thread the needle for her. I could have been three then. I don't remember when she died.

My daddy was Josek Chaim Bromberg, but in some documents it's only Josek Bromberg. He was born in Bodzentyn in 1882, on 18th November. He was an educated man. He wrote Russian well [in that historical period the biggest part of Poland belonged to the Russian Empire], he could write Polish, Jewish and pray in Hebrew. He graduated from a tsarist public elementary school. He was an artisan; he worked as a leather-stitcher. He worked at home. There were three beds in the apartment, four people a bed and there was a workshop as well, leather products - we had five machines. They gave Father the nickname Josek Smotek. [Editor's note: the nickname Smotek ('raggy') is derived from the Polish word 'szmata', meaning 'rag'.] Everyone had a nickname there. Smotek, because Father's father, or grandfather, traded, that is bought old clothing, old rags. There used to be those [the old-clothesmen] who walked around and shouted 'Szmot, szmot, galgany, szmates skupuje!' [Polish for: 'Rags, rags, old rags, I buy rags!'], and people took out whatever they had. They'd pay for them with plates or with other things.

Daddy was slim, he was just right. He didn't wear side locks, but he had this short beard. He practiced religion, kept kosher, but he wasn't backwards. He attended prayers and the older he got, the more religious he became. With us, children, it was the other way round. We would try to skirt round fasting, we didn't want to fast. We sometimes sneaked out from prayer. Dad was not a strict father. I would constantly go to the village with him: to buy food, milk in the summer, later to guard orchards. He did beat me once, but I'm very grateful for that. This was on a fast day, but I don't remember which one. Father was in the prayer house all day long. He came back in the evening and asked me to do something at home. I talked backed to him a bit and he chased me around town with a leather strap, it was called a pociegiel [old Polish word for belt]. I hid in the schoolyard, behind the gate, that's where he caught me and gave me a beating, so that I never talked back to him again.

Father was very well-read, and he was also active in the community. His drawer, next to the table where he worked, was full of stamps and seals. When I was a boy, in elementary school, I took these stamps and stamped things with them, so I saw [what was on them]: 'President of the Fire Brigade', 'President of the Tenants' Association.' He was everywhere. He liked social work. And he also worked at his job, but he didn't put as much effort into it. Sometimes customers would come and he wouldn't be there, because he was busy. That's when Mother called him an idler, because she herself had to toil and look for wages, so she'd be able to buy a loaf of bread.

Father, because he did social work, received different books, magazines, notebooks from Kielce. I don't know who sent them. There were lots of these books at home. We all read them. Whenever someone felt like reading, they'd just pick up a book and read. These were mostly books in Yiddish, but about different issues. For example, my favorite one was King Solomon's Wisdom. But there were also books by Jewish writers: Sholem Asch [1](#), Sholem Aleichem [2](#), religious books. As to newspapers, we'd mostly read Hajnt [Yiddish 'today', a popular Jewish Zionistic journal, published from 1908 until 1939] and Der Moment [3](#). Thanks to these books, Father knew all kinds of laws exceptionally well. When someone was having problems with institutions, with the police, the court, with the government, he'd always advise everyone, help write applications to the court. He had lots of friends because of that, Poles and Jews. If they were Jews, they were enlightened. I mean not superstitious. Daddy wouldn't take any kind of fee for those services.

There was a time, still during tsarist times, I wasn't even born yet, when he had put away quite a lot of money, I don't remember how much it was, counting in millions, he told me, but I've

forgotten. He was supposed to buy a house, but, in the end, he had a quarrel with the seller of the house about a few zloty. Practically a week or two weeks later, money was exchanged and there was no money and no house. [Editor's note: In January 1924 German marks ceased being valid currency in Poland and were replaced by the Polish zloty.] I later played with these millions, which were put away in a chest. We were left with no savings whatsoever.

There were seven of us, children, at home and we never even tasted candy, Father never even brought one piece of candy home. The only thing I could have was this lemon [etrog] which was brought over from Israel [then Palestine] for Sukkot. Father would get this lemon from the prayer house and I carried it around, from house to house. Women would usually pray next to this lemon and gave me something for bringing it over – a zloty or two, sometimes three, and that was a lot. [A kilogram of sugar cost about 1 zloty at that time]. And only when I had earned my first money, was I able to find out what candy was.

Father was even supposed to leave for Brazil. This was in 1925 or 1926. There were such possibilities then. Jews could go abroad, to work, because there was extreme poverty in the area of Kielce. The land wasn't fertile, there was no industry. Jews left if they only could, sometimes to Canada, sometimes to Brazil or other countries. And Father, he already had the necessary papers for leaving for Brazil.

My father was of a rather socialist persuasion. He didn't belong to any political organization. They chose him for everything: he was president here and president there. They chose him, because he was enlightened. He could advise anyone, he just couldn't manage himself, so that his children would have a piece of bread, so they wouldn't go hungry. He was very sociable, people liked listening to him; he was constantly leading discussions on different topics.

Father had serious surgery, the first successful operation of its kind before the war, for gastrointestinal cancer. He was operated through the rectum. This operation took place in Poznanski Hospital [named after its founder Yisrael Poznanski, Jewish industrialist and philanthropist] in Lodz. It was performed by three surgeons – Jews. Then, after the operation, Father was treated at the Evangelical Hospital, also in Lodz, they treated him with radium. And this was all for free. I remember Germans used to come to our house to make sure everything was all right. This was the first operation of its kind. My father died in 1942, after his deportation to Treblinka [4](#).

Father had a brother, Jankiel, a sister named Zelda and, I think, one more sister, but I can't recall that now. Jankiel lived in Bodzentyn. He was a tradesman, he supplied animals to the butcher shop ran by Josek, Mother's brother. He had a wife, but I didn't know her, because she had died earlier. He was raising his children alone. I went to the same grade with these cousins. I think he died shortly before the war. Aunt Zelda, after she married her name was Szafir, had five daughters. Two of them settled in Toronto [Canada] – Bela Gewelc, that was the name of one of them, the second one was Gitla Pollak. And two settled in Rio de Janeiro [Brazil] – Dwojra Mekler and Dora Kerszberg. The fifth daughter, Sura Fajga, stayed in Poland, her husband was a shoemaker. She had five daughters and one son, Chil. Aunt Zelda died in Bodzentyn, while I was still living there.

My mother, Nacha Bromberg [nee Wajntraub], was thirteen years younger than my father. She spent her entire life with him, at home. She was a housewife. My parents told me about how they met, but I had other things on my mind then; I had to study. This was a small town: everyone knew

each other and knew everything about others. I only remember how Mother talked about how she got a kajt [Yiddish: chain, irons, here: necklace, neck chain], she got a golden necklace and earrings. I never saw them, because we were poor, there were several fires in the town and Mother had to borrow money from someone, and she pawned her earrings and the necklace and she never bought them back, because she didn't have any money. [Editor's note: the monography of the town mentions only one fire, in 1917, when the synagogue was destroyed.]

My mother was a beautiful, black-haired woman. Almost like an Armenian. She had a pretty face and curly hair, which used to be long, but she wore a wig. I even took this wig every two weeks to be groomed. I used to ask Mother how she could cut such beautiful hair and wear such a chomato [Polish, horse-collar or something heavy and uncomfortable], like a horse. And the reason for this was so that the woman wouldn't be attractive for other men after she got married. Such was the tradition. Mother wore woolen scarf with tassels. Such was the custom then, that women in the countryside – both Jewish and Polish women – didn't wear coats but these scarves [heavy kerchiefs, throws].

Mother was a wise woman, but, unfortunately, a slave. We weren't aware of it then. She used to say: 'Can you imagine that nine people are making a mess here and I am the only one cleaning up.' And there were no detergents like today, no powder or anything. She helped Father in everything she could. She had to bring hides from Radom [approx. 50 km from Bodzentyn] and from Szydłowiec [approx. 30 km from Bodzentyn]. She'd have to take a cart to get there. There was a Jewish cart driver: he had a cart and a horse and he took people to town, because there were no buses then. The horse pulled the cart for many kilometers. My mother later fell ill, because there were such huge snowstorms and her blood got cold.

So Mother helped Father with everything, she minded the children; she did the laundry, cleaned the house and earned money for bread. She never hit us. I sometimes protested and shouted when Mother was dividing up pieces of meat that 'this one had more'. So Mother would cut up this piece of meat into little pieces and then it was all right. She later talked about this and laughed that, after all, it was the same. My mother had no political views, she wasn't politically active. She knew how to pray and how to read and write in Yiddish, because we spoke Yiddish at home.

My mother had a hernia and in 1938 she went to the hospital, Poznanski Hospital in Lodz, to have it removed. It was a Jewish hospital, free. And that's where she died, during the operation, because they gave her too much anesthesia. I managed to see her once before the surgery. I brought her some oranges, or mandarins. And Mother wrote me this letter on the napkins which I had used for the fruit. A letter, almost like a will: 'Pray to God that I survive, take care of the apple of my eye – that is your sister – and pray that you're not left like these sheep without your shepherd.' That's what she called our sister, because she was our treasure, the only girl in the family: the apple of our eyes; she was everything for us. I kept this letter and ran away to Russia with it, but when they robbed me in Lublin, everything was lost then.

Mother had two brothers, Josek and Hersz and a sister, Bela, who got married in Szydłowiec; her married name was Rewinska. Her husband's name was Chaim Szymon [Rewinski]. He used both names. She had two daughters with him and a son, Symcha. Josek was a butcher. His wife's name was Matylda, Mate Wajntraub. He had two sons – Rachmil and Symcha and three daughters – Hendla, Fajga and Estera Malka. Hersz, Mother's second brother, had a wife named Lea and many

children: Natan, Chil, Chaim, Fajga, Nacha, Saba-Szewa and Estera-Malka. He died in 1936 or 1937 in Lodz.

We lived on Pasięka [Street], next to Dolny Rynek [Lower Market]. This was the first street down, as you walked to Gorny Rynek [Upper Market]. It was called Pasięka [Polish for beehive], because there were bees there, flowers and the bees collected honey from those flowers; there were lots of bees. And when you walked down to the mill, there were fish ponds there and water mills. Our house was right next to the street. There was a hallway next to the entrance and two apartments with entrances from the hall. Our apartment was maybe a bit bigger than this room of mine [approx. 20 sqm] and so many people – nine of us – living there. Us, that is parents and seven children, we lived in the room downstairs.

There was a stove for cooking and for heating. And you'd use wood for heating, not coal. On Mondays peasants used to bring wood from the forest and sell it. Only rich Jews could afford it, the poor ones would have to buy branches. We were those poor ones. We later had saws, so we had to saw this wood ourselves. I remember, because I helped Father and my brothers. There was no electricity and you'd have to bring water from the well. The well was on Dolny Rynek. I had a so-called 'kuromyslo' [archaic Polish word], a kind of wooden harness with wire hooks and I had to carry the water in that. And when you did the laundry, you'd carry it to the river for rinsing. There were machines that Father worked on, a table where you had to get everything ready. There wasn't much furniture – a cupboard, a table, three beds – because we didn't have room for anything more. Three, four people slept in one bed and I always slept with Father. And there was a cradle; I had to rock my dear sister.

There was a shop upstairs. A kosher butcher, shochet, lived above us. A tzaddik from Ostrowiec used to visit him. When I was a boy, I found a dog. There were lots of them. I found the dog, took him, raised him from the time he was little, made him a doghouse in the hallway and played with him each morning. I remember, one day this tzaddik was looking out the window, because there were beautiful sunrises in the summer and I was chasing the dog and he says: 'Du sheygetz! Bald in der fri yugst du sikh mit a keylef?!' ['You sheygetz ('non-Jew', male)! You've been chasing the dog since early in the morning!' in Yiddish]

Our house didn't have a yard. In fact, there was moisture from the back. On market days women would come from Gorny Rynek to our house and relieve themselves next to the wall. And somehow no one came up with the idea of fencing in this property, so others wouldn't be able to enter. The wall was moist all the time and this house was made of stones, not bricks, and stones also create moisture. So this is why you'd get ill with arthritis.

We didn't have our own garden, but I remember how peasants, who owed Father money and weren't able to pay it back, convinced him to take an orchard from them in the spring. At first Father knew nothing about orchards, but after some time, when he got the hang of it, he'd wait for the trees to bloom and he would know at once how many puds [Russian, pud: a unit of weight equaling approx. 17 kg] of pears, or apples or cherries there would be. And we'd make money out of this later.

We had fruit, and my mother would usually give the rotten fruit to children and good fruit would be kept where our neighbor used to live, but moved out, on the opposite side of the hall, on hay. After we had picked the fruit, we would go to Suchedniow, 16 kilometers from Bodzentyn, with Mother,

we'd stand on the market with a scale and sell the fruit. Later, we took these orchards each year. And it was finally enough money to get by.

There were all kinds of ceremonies organized in our town, mostly on holidays. There was this Liber Wajngold, who had a red beard and he would always get drunk. Because after such holidays like New Year's [Rosh Hashanah], Judgment Day [Yom Kippur], Sukkot, that is kuczki [Polish for Sukkot], Jews were allowed to drink and dance. [Editor's note: on Yom Kippur a 25-hour-long fast is strictly prescribed, but the afternoon before Yom Kippur, it is a special mitzvah to eat a festive meal, and also after Yom Kippur it is possible, but dancing has no link to Yom Kippur, that happens at Sukkot.]. And he liked to get drunk. He'd drink himself unconscious, he'd go crazy in the street, on the market, Poles would clap for him. The reception of the Torah on Mount Sinai was also celebrated in our town. That was called Simchat Torah, that is the Joy of Torah [Editor's note: Shavuot celebrates the receiving of the Torah by an all night long learning, Simchat Torah ('Rejoicing in the Torah') celebrates it by dancing and singing. Drinking is also common during this time.]

One day the Jews in the town decided to renovate the Torah. I don't remember why, perhaps it was damaged, after all the Torah gets damaged like all other books, the paper becomes yellow. When the Torah got damaged, it had stains or tears, you'd have to organize a funeral for the Torah, bury it in the ground, like for a person. [When a Torah is no longer usable, it should be placed in a waterproof container and buried.] The Torah was written with a goose quill, on parchment. There was a specialist to do this. [The Torah Scrolls are written in holiness by a religious man who is also a qualified scribe, always hand-written on parchment scrolls in attractive Hebrew calligraphy known as 'STAM' (Sifrei Torah, [Tefillin](#) and [Mezuzot](#)).] He used to live in Kielce and he took money for copying the Torah. You'd have to pay for each letter. When the community decided to buy a new Torah, they announced it in town and waited for donations. When on Saturdays [Sabbath] and holidays Jews were called upon to read fragments of the Torah, they had to say how many letters for the writing of the Torah they wanted to buy, that is how much they wanted to donate. One bought himself five letters, another ten, another 50. It depended on how much they could afford.

My father also bought, donated a few letters, but not too many, because he didn't have enough for food. So the Torah would be written and money collected. The Jews would make these donations orally, because you couldn't have money with you on a Saturday. If the city was not surrounded by telephone wires, then you couldn't carry anything in your pockets on Saturdays and walk too far on foot. [Editor's note: surrounding the city with wires was connected with separating Sabbath space. This space was treated as one's own apartment, where you could move around freely, without breaking religious rules.] Only after electricity had been installed in the city, were you able to carry money with you in the area where there were wires. When there was no eruw [expanding the Sabbath borders], then people didn't carry any objects with them, especially on Saturdays. Later, even when we had the wires, you still couldn't carry any money. Buying, handling money, giving it to someone, that was all strictly prohibited. You could only carry a handkerchief in your pocket. I know about these wires from the Torah, it's written somewhere there, in the writings. [Editor's note: The referred regulation takes part of the Talmud, the Mishnah, Tract Eruvin, Chapter 5: Regulations concerning the boundaries of a town and the measurements of the legal limits.]

Then, after the writing of the Torah was done, you'd have to put all these pages together, this cover would be made, and one more with golden edges, and these handles [Yad] would be made,

silver crowns and lions, because the Jewish symbols are usually two lions holding the Torah. [The lion of Judah is one of the most popular symbols of the Jewish people.] You can see them everywhere, like next to prayer houses. And then, when everything was ready, a date would be set when all the tzaddiks, religious Jews, got together and there was a huge ceremony when these so-called scrolls, that is the Torah, were carried into the prayer house. It was later kept in this special cupboard [aron kodesh], it's a holy place.

Poles, usually those who had houses or stores on the market square, used to stand in their windows during such ceremonies and watch. They didn't bother us. In my childhood, the relationships between Poles and Jews were very good. I still remember this with nostalgia, until this very day. So, until 1936 the relations between Jews and peasants were wonderful. Jews slept in villages, they prayed, rocked back and forth, and nobody bothered them. At night, when they were in this shack guarding the orchard and there was a storm with lightning, they'd go into the house, with the farmer. There were floors without boards, just made of clay and they'd sleep on straw.

There was one incident. I was maybe five years old then, I don't remember exactly. A Polish woman, Malareska was her name, lived several houses from the prayer house. She didn't have a husband, but she had two sons. This happened during Simchat Torah. [Editor's note: the festival described below is partly Rosh Hashanah, the Feast of Trumpets, partly Simchat Torah: the interviewee probably confused the rituals.] The rebbe, the tzaddik and other Jewish guests came to receive the Torah into the prayer house. I was there as well, as a little boy. Jews dressed up as riders on horses, they put on skirts symbolizing the arrival of the Messiah, trumpets were played, and the horn [shofar]. We walked to the prayer house on wet snow - I was with this rabbi, a whole crowd of us. I was very pious then, religious, I was studying, so I wanted to be close to the rabbi, but there were some other Jews from Bodzentyn walking next to me and Father was in that crowd. So when we were passing this Malareska's house, she was standing in the hall, she made a snowball, she threw one, then another and the rabbi cursed her. I heard it, because I was next to the rabbi. She had cows and I think she had goats as well. She stored hay for them up in the attic. One day she got on a ladder to get that hay, the ladder slipped, she fell. The first time she was just a bit bruised. But then one or two weeks later, not much time passed, she had a second accident like that, she fell and she killed herself.

There were six of us, brothers, at home. There was a one and a half year difference between each of us; a new one would be born every 18 months. After the last one, the youngest brother, after five years, Father's precious daughter was born. Our treasure. The oldest brother was Moszek Majer, named after Grandfather. He was born in 1913. He was a tailor. He studied tailoring for three years, with one younger brother, for free. He died in the army, in Warsaw, defending the citadel [September 1939]. The next brother was Chil, Chil Szmul. This brother and the younger Wolf were registered as twins, but they weren't twins. This was a mistake, one was overlooked first and then they were both registered together. He was a tailor too. Wolf Symcha was younger; he was a barber, self-trained. He fixed electricity, renovated radios, played in the theater in Bodzentyn. He had amazing connections, and he was the one who brought us to Lodz. The next one was Abram, thanks to Mother or Father he was an apprentice in a Jewish factory in Lodz. He was apprenticing at some spinning mill.

Chil, Wolf and Abram died in 1942 or 1943. Someone told me about it, someone who was there at the camp and survived. The three brothers worked in Starachowice. They always stuck together.

When the Germans called one of them to work, they went together. One day they called Abram. The Germans would shoot the sick inmates from the camp and needed people to bury them. They called Abram, but all the brothers went. But, in the end, the Germans didn't want to have witnesses, so they murdered all three of them. They shot them or buried them alive, I don't know this exactly.

The sixth brother was called Hersz. I don't remember his middle name, but we only used our first names, although officially each one had two names, except me, I only had one. Hersz didn't have a profession. Because he hadn't managed to learn one yet, he was still young, he went to a public school in Lodz, on 116 Zgierska Street. He died in Treblinka with our father, sister-in-law, her child and our sister. In early 1942 they were deported to Suchedniow [126 km from Lodz]. First they were there for two days without any food or water, before the cattle wagons got there. My sister was the seventh child. She was five years younger than the youngest brother. Her name was Estera Chaja Zeld. She went to school in Lodz, on 25 Limanowskiego Street. She was ten years old when I saw her for the last time.

We were not very close as siblings. We loved one another, but mostly we'd spend time separately; each one had his own friends. Sometimes we played together, went skidding on the pond in winter-time. We went to the castle in Bodzentyn. We gathered there during the school break, that's where the report cards were handed out at the end of each school year. We used to sing the national anthem and Rota ['The Oath', Polish patriotic song]. And we spent the holidays together, at home.

We used to go to the prayer house together, or we would meet before the entrance, because it was close by. Mother didn't always go to the prayer house, only on holidays and Saturdays. Mostly men used to go there, even several times a day, because there is a morning prayer, then the evening prayer, and there are three prayers on Saturdays.

My [Jewish] name is Jankiel and I was named after Mother's father. I was born in 1919, on 21st April, the day after Hitler's birthday. This was at home, in Bodzentyn. We were all born there, in the same beds we slept in. A midwife helped Mother during labor, a Pole, Kazubinski's wife. I was the fourth child. I split the younger and the older siblings. And I am the only one left. When I was three I went to cheder and these first years I spent at home. I remember when I was little, I used to run away from Mother, because I didn't like having my bath in a tub. I couldn't even walk yet, so I'd run away on all fours. I will never forget that. I remember even what shirt I used to wear - a flannel shirt with a pink flower pattern. I usually recall myself as being the one in the bad way. I wasn't allowed to go out and play. I had to stay at home and mind the younger brothers and sister. I had to sit next to the cradle and rock it.

There were many children at home, so one would raise the other. When I was small, I remember playing these games with my siblings: we played palant [traditional game similar to baseball, played everywhere in Europe under different names and slight differences in rules], went skidding on ice. Because there was no money for a sled, we'd make one from these folding chairs. There were all kinds of games. I remember playing doctor with the girls. I was small; I could have been maybe three years old. We all met - boys and girls, up in the attic and that's when I felt these girls up. I also played with my friends a lot, only sometimes with my brothers, each one of us had friends of our own age.

I went to cheder from the age of three, to different melamedim. A melamed was a teacher. I had three of them. There were religious subjects at cheder, translating prayers from Hebrew to Yiddish, the Five Books of Moses. Because at cheder we first learned prayers in Hebrew, then there was the study of books: Bava Metziah, Bava Kama, then law and then Shulchan Arukh [Heb. 'Set Table', compendium of those areas of the halakhah that are applicable today. It was composed by Rabbi Yosef Karo of Safed in the 1560s, and became generally accepted as authoritative after Rabbi Moshe Isserles of Cracow supplemented it in the 1570s with notes (known as the Mappah – 'Tablecloth') giving the rulings followed by Ashkenazim.]. We learned about the principles of kosher life, sleep, everything about Jewish holiday customs. There's everything in Shulchan Aruch, how I am supposed to sleep, which side to lie on, how to get up, which sleeve to put on first, which second, everything. Such details. And this Bava Metziah, that's studying, first law. It starts out in Hebrew, of course. I am walking with my friend on the street and I find a tallit, a prayer garment. I bend over and pick it up, 'I found it, therefore I should have it', but he also says 'I should have it' and we're ready to quarrel. And the problem needs to be solved, and everything starts out with details.

Then there are comments. It's called Rashi [5](#) commentary. It's written in Aramean. All the disputes are solved, just like they are in court, a final conclusion is reached. All difficult things, even family issues, concerning sex, but I didn't understand that. I shouldn't be saying this, but, as I said, there were three beds at home and I slept in one bed with Father and I never knew why he would get out of bed at night, I didn't know where he went! Such was the culture, everything was normal. There was a time for everything, you'd find out about everything in due time. Later, when I was already studying everything in cheder, I began to study the kaballah. Many things in there didn't seem to fit. I started asking the rabbi. How, I said, did Adam's offspring come about if he only had three sons? And other problems of this kind. And he answered: 'When you grow up, you will know everything, you will understand everything.' I also remember that each Saturday at cheder we used to be assigned to these religious Jews, we met with them after the Saturday feast and they examined us in the Torah, asked us questions about everything we had studied in the last week.

Corporal punishment was used in cheder, when someone went skidding on Saturday and someone told on him, or when he was guilty of something else, stole something, was accused of something or caught red-handed. I remember some melamed had a so-called kanczuk [short leather whip] – a stick with leather straps, quite a few of these straps; they used it to beat students on their fingers or behinds. There was a teacher with a short leg – Symcha – and he'd sometimes kick students with this leg when they misbehaved. The student had to go under a table, he'd hold on to the table top, kick him with this short leg and yell: 'You foundling, you mamzer ['bastard', Yiddish]!'

There was also another teacher who, when someone misbehaved, ordered the student to get undressed to his underwear and stand on this special chest, with a round lid, in the corner of the room. The teacher would bring a broom made of twigs, he'd take out one twig, a rod, give it to a second student and the rest of the broom to the one who was standing on the chest. He had to hold this broom up in the air, above his head. He'd have to stand in this position for 30 minutes or an hour. The student who got that rod had to make sure that the student with the broom wouldn't put it down and if that happened, he was obliged to beat him with this rod on his buttocks. And then came an even more severe form of punishment. After half an hour, when the student got off that chest, the melamed asked the students to stand in two lines, two rows of students and he led

that student through the middle. Each student from each row received one rod and when the culprit was walking next to him, he had to beat him with that rod on his behind. None of these punishments were ever used on me. I was very well behaved.

I later started attending a public elementary school. I remember this school with nostalgia. The principal's name was Pastula; his wife taught me Polish. I remember this one incident connected with school: we were not wealthy, so Father cut our hair with scissors at home and, of course, he didn't cut very evenly. One day, when Father was cutting my hair he cut off one of my side locks, I quickly covered the other one with my hand and didn't let him cut that one off. Of course, these weren't long and curly side locks that Hasidim [see Hasidism] [6](#) have, but short ones. Religion says that when the time for harvest comes, you shouldn't cut everything, but leave something on the field. And, supposedly, this is where these side locks come from. [Editor's note: according to the Encyclopedia Judaica, Leviticus 19:27 and 21:5 refer to the hair between the head and the cheeks (the side locks) as 'corners of your land', forbidden to be destroyed, whereas, there are many different explanations in the Torah, Talmud, Shulchan Arukh or other sources about the origin of this ban.] I went to school. I was in second grade then. In class Mrs. Pastula noticed my hair and asked: 'And what is this supposed to be? Here it's cut and here it isn't.' So I told her that my father cut my hair like this and that I didn't let him cut it on the other side. So she told me that if I didn't make my hair even on both sides, she wouldn't let me graduate. I was very pious then, I went to cheder. And there was no other way, I had to repeat the second grade. But later I knew everything and I was the best student.

Jewish and Polish children attended this elementary school together. Jews weren't taught religion there. We would leave during the first lesson, because that was usually Catholic religion [catechism]. So then we moved out of the way, went to the school ballground and roughhoused there. We studied Polish, mathematics, geography and calligraphy, and there was singing, drawing and gymnastics. In the sixth grade I dropped out of school at the end of the school year, because our entire family left for Lodz in 1933.

My favorite teacher was Miss Kaminska, her name was later Mrs. Zolcinska. She was so loving, like a mother. There was also a teacher, a man called Nawrot, who taught us mathematics – algebra and singing. He was the best mathematics teacher in the entire district. There were two teachers who were sisters, their last name was Lukasiewicz. I remember one of them was short and the other one tall and this tall one had a fiancee, who was a pilot. The pilot of an airplane, a Kukuruznik ['corn stalk cutter', a biplane originally used for spraying fertilizer and pesticides on fields, but also used later in the war]. He would fly in from Kielce, circle the market and the school. Everyone knew he was looking for his fiancee. Sometimes he would throw a letter or a parcel for her from the plane. Mr. Lukomski, I don't remember his first name, taught me crafts.

We were not harassed at school, but there was this one teacher, a scoutmaster, his name was Pyzik and he was an anti-Semite. I think he was the gymnastics teacher. He taught this song: 'Oj dydy, dydy, pozdychaly wszystkie Zydy. A od czego? A od borscu kwasnego' ['Oh diddy diddy, all the Jews have died. And what have they died of? Of sour beet soup.'] And once we beat him up for that. It was a Saturday. My friends and I used to go to the forest in the summertime to pick blueberries, because it was hot. And this teacher used to ride on his bike, in uniform, wearing a hat. When he was passing by the cemetery on this bike, we gathered some stones, hid in the ditches covered with bushes and when we threw this hailstorm of stones, he didn't feel like singing these

songs anymore.

I was a good student. Once I even had to go to school on a Saturday. This was during an inspector's visit. The inspector would sometimes come to check how the students were doing. Miss Kaminska pleaded with Mother and Father, so they'd allow me to come to school on a Saturday, but without a pencil and a notebook, because they wouldn't have allowed it otherwise [one wasn't allowed to carry anything on Saturdays, because that was considered labor]. She wanted to show off how much her students knew. So they asked me questions and I answered perfectly. I even remember one question, about a writer named Jachowicz [Jachowicz, Stanislaw (1796-1857): Polish pedagogue and writer of fairy tales] and I told them everything. I had several favorite subjects at school: I liked Polish very much and geography; mathematics wasn't very easy for me. It was professor Nawrot who taught me. He was a very good teacher, but for himself. He knew a lot, but he couldn't pass on this knowledge of how to understand algebra to his students. Unfortunately, there were no students who could do their homework on their own.

I never received any kind of punishment. I remember in public school I once got the so-called hand from my favorite teacher, with a pencil case or ruler, I don't remember exactly. Such was the story: the teacher wasn't in the classroom, the boys broke a window, nobody wanted to admit it, nobody wanted to tell on anyone. She knew I was too delicate for that [breaking the window]. So I was punished then, because everyone was, with this so-called hand.

They thought highly of me at school. Later even when they wanted to fire some teacher, because she hit someone unjustly, this Kazubinski came to us, on behalf of his daughter Zosia, and asked me to approach all my classmates with him to collect signatures that we have such respect for this teacher that we don't want to see her punished. Kazubinski had a barber shop in Bodzentyn, he was a feldsher [barber]. There was this custom in small towns that each barber was also a feldsher. He was a well known person. I went to school with his daughter Zosia. She used to lisp; she was a very slim girl.

Between 1929 and 1930 I also took Jewish religion classes in Polish. They were organized in the public school, but in the evenings. They took place twice a week. They brought two teachers from Kielce for this purpose. One of them was Szwarcberg and I don't remember the other one's name. I took these lessons, although there was no mandatory schooling then. I remember from my childhood that there were children who didn't go to school at all. And later, well, later I was in Lodz. And there children looked at everything differently. All the rules of keeping kosher were not followed, like they used to be. At first, you'd wear a cap, but after some time young people didn't want to wear it. You'd go for prayers more because of tradition or so that Father wouldn't feel hurt. On Saturday, when Father was praying and I was cleaning my shoes, he would reproach me: 'How can you? One can see through the window that you're cleaning your shoes!' We'd try to swing the lead.

We started going to different organizations, some to Bund [7](#), others to Poalei Zion [8](#). I didn't want to study anymore. Some would later sit in the prayer house and study on their own. All day and all night, they'd sit there nodding their heads. They studied commentaries and deeper laws of Judaism. Not me. The family thought they'd have two rabbis, I was supposed to be a rabbi at home and Chaim Wajntraub at my uncle's. Nothing came out of this in the end. Both my parents and his parents were disappointed, because neither he nor I became rabbis.

We were poor. I couldn't have all the books I needed for school. When there was one book in the house, it would be used for ten years. Some pages would be glued together, some were torn out. Although there was no habit then, like my son had, of doodling in books, a book would become damaged anyway. Every year, the book would be passed on to your siblings. The rich ones used to go to a store and buy new books. The poor ones would buy math books, Polish, geography and others from those who moved on to higher grades. When I needed other schoolbooks, I went to see my friends – girls and boys. Our neighbors were mostly Jewish.

I had one close friend, Jankiel, the youngest of the richest family in town, the Szechters. They had a steam mill and hardware stores. With this mill they supplied electricity for the entire town. When there was no electricity in town, the residents arranged it with him, set up the posts and power would go from this mill. The mill would grind grain and supply electricity. They were the richest. They were the only ones in town who had a telephone. The phone was in the hall, next to the door. It wasn't like these modern ones, it had a crank. When you wanted to make a phone call, you had to crank this crank hard and long, and the headphone was separate. Poles – the gentry – had farms and the Szechters purchased all their grain, they'd grind it and sell it.

When I was in second grade, this friend of mine got sick and had to have his appendix taken out. Once, in the summer, we went with our school to Lysa Gora [113 km from Bodzentyn], where Dab Bartek [Bartek Oak Tree, oldest living tree in Poland] grows. I remember this friend said that he had two zloty in his pocket. Later, he must have dropped it in the grass and he accused me that I had taken it and didn't give it back. I remember this really hurt me, I later held a grudge against him. And that's how our friendship ended. Later, when I was sick and needed to find out what was going on at school, I went to visit my Polish classmates, girls, who lived outside of town. There was Kwietniewska there and the Czerniakiewicz sisters. And I did my homework there, or borrowed a book, or copied what was taught at school and what the homework was.

When it comes to friends from school, I mostly hung out with the boys. As boys we had common games, we played hopscotch and palant. The ball was made of rags, we had a bat and you had to run and then bail yourself out. In later years we used to go on school field trips: I was in Bieliny in the Swietokrzyskie Mountains [110 km from Bodzentyn]. We used to stay overnight at schools. These field trips were usually organized in the summer. There were also field trips during the school year, for example to Wachock [15 km from Bodzentyn], but I didn't go on that one. Wachock is a small town famous for bad jokes [similar to American southern or redneck jokes]. But I did go to Slupinowa, to Lysa Gora and then Swiety Krzyz [a mountain peak in the eastern part of the Lysogory Mountains, a 12th century monastery and a Benedictine church are located there]. When you entered there was this black board next to the door. People said that if you slap your hand on that board and there's moisture, then you'll come back there once again. I slapped my hand, but there was no moisture.

There on Swiety Krzyz, there was the largest prison, where all the inmates were sentenced for life. Even the one who killed Narutowicz, our president, this Niewiadomski, that was his name, he was also there. [Niewiadomski, Eligiusz (1869-1923): painter, art historian. On 16th December 1922 he assassinated President Gabriel Narutowicz] In that prison there was also the famous Jewish 'supposed thief'. There's even a book about him, a very beautiful book. It's called Urke Nachalnik's diary [original title: 'Zyciorys wlasny przestepcy' (A Criminal's Own Life Story)]; also see Nachalnik, Urke] [9](#). Urke Nachalnik was a pseudonym. He loved his mother very much and didn't want her to

find out what her son was doing for a living. He came from a very interesting family – pious, religious. I remember one anecdote, according to which they sent him to a rebbe from Kielce and he seduced the rabbi's wife. He had his faults. He was a scoundrel, he'd have guilt-feelings all the time, but he would promise himself there would be no more of it. His real name, it escaped my memory.

I didn't go on holiday with my parents. I used to go around the villages with Mother or Father, collecting milk. When I was small I watched cows being milked; I was there during the milking. And then we had these orchards I mentioned before, from peasants in different villages. We picked fruit and later went around different markets with these goods. When I came home from school, I took the scale and several baskets of apples or cherries and went out to sell them. Sometimes, when we had a lot of fruit, Mother would rent a cart and I'd go with her to Suchedniow to sell it all. Or when there were church fetes in Catholic churches, on Saint Catherine's [24th November] or Saint Thomas' [21st December] feast-day, Mother would make some gingerbread cookies, chocolates, candy, pretzels and other merchandise and we'd carry it all on our backs, sometimes 11-12 kilometers, sometimes only 3-7 kilometers. We used to carry this baggage on foot and then set up a stall in front of the church and sell it. These faithful Catholics would first go to pray, the noon mass or vespers, and when they finished they would leave the church and start buying. There's no point in talking about this now. Sometimes it happened that they'd attack us, topple the merchandise over, mostly peasants, but when you compare this to today? Now it wouldn't be possible for any Jew to go to a Catholic fete with goods to sell.

There was no anti-Semitism at my school. All that was there, was that when they let us, boys, out for the break, into the schoolyard, we'd knock each other down, fight and call each other names. So sometimes one peasant child, when some Jew made him mad, would shout: 'You beilis!' And Beilis [10](#) was, under tsarist rule, a Jew who lived in a small town, somewhere in the east, close to Romania, I don't remember exactly, who was accused of a ritual murder. At that time it was believed that Jews catch children for blood, to make matzah. This case took a very long time, but he was finally acquitted. At the same time in Poland, at Jasna Gora [a monastery] in Czestochowa, there was this Pole, his name was Macoch, who took care of the monastery. And different things got lost there, offerings and gold. Nobody knew who was stealing. And this Macoch was caught. It was at the same time: this case with Beilis for the ritual murder and Macoch being caught stealing. So when the boys were fighting with each other, then all you could hear was: 'You beilis!' and 'You macoch!' And that was all the quarreling.

The first time I saw a car was in Bodzentyn. I could have been seven or eight years old then, I don't remember exactly. In addition to those who brought merchandise from town, there was also this Jew called Sztarkman. I was in one class with his daughter Chana. His family lived on Kielecka Street and had two passenger cars. They used to take people to Kielce. I only saw a tram in Lodz, I was about 14 years old then. I think this was in Tuszyn, a Tuszyn-Lodz tram.

After school I worked as a courier in a merchants' bank. My father was an activist there, or so I think. I earned some money there. When there were summons for paying taxes, or credit payments, I had to take them to the correct address and leave them there. I made 2 zloty a week. Later, as time passed, trucks started coming to Bodzentyn from Cracow, supplying merchandise to grocery stores. The driver had a list, but he didn't know what was where, so they directed him to me. I got in the truck with him and directed him. We stopped by one store, dropped off whatever

we were supposed to and continued on our way. I remember that one time, when we were parking outside a store, the driver went into the store, I stayed in the cabin, caught the steering wheel and pushed the pedal. There was a small hill there, so I moved the truck maybe five or ten meters. I got scared and took my foot off the pedal. That was my first time at the wheel.

We used to spend Saturdays first in the prayer house, then at the table, eating. And then we'd go our own ways. It depended on whether it was summer or winter. If it was winter, we stayed in the room. No one knew about double windows then and it could get really cold. The winter of 1929 was the coldest. When you wanted to see who was walking down the street, you'd breathe on the window. You had to breathe on it, because there were these leaves on the glass [hoarfrost on the windows]. Once, I remember, one squire was moving from one estate to a different one. He moved his things in these long horse-drawn carts, chickens as well. I remember how we all watched them on the market square. They all died, because it was so cold.

At my family home there were different traditional meals for every holiday. Holidays were celebrated as they should have been. My parents weren't Orthodox, but everything was kept kosher, according to the principles of Jewish religion. We even went to a kosher butcher, who slaughtered geese or hens. That's how it is with Jews, because ducks lived where there was sand, or water, some of them had sand in their intestines, so it had to be checked. When Mother was preparing dishes, and she did everything on her own, she took each egg, it didn't matter if she was baking a cake or doing something else, she cracked it open and checked if it hadn't been fertilized. If it had, she gave it to the janitor, so he had everything for free. When there was meat for a holiday meal – poultry, chicken, turkey or other, or beef – then you'd first take it to the rabbi before it was prepared. The rabbi made the final decision, he studied, he would examine the meat and say: 'You can eat it, it's kosher' and when he said 'You cannot' then we'd give it away to the janitor. You'd give it away for free. In Bodzentyn you'd take it to your neighbors, favorite ones, for free, of course.

My favorite holiday was Easter [Pesach]. I still remember my favorite meals connected with these holidays: red borscht with potatoes, broth with kneidlakh made from matzah flour and meat. Then you'd fry these bubelech, eggs with matzah flour, in a frying pan. 'Vorspeise', that's German and means appetizer, in Yiddish this was tsimes [traditional holiday dish, made from cooked carrots, apples, dried fruit, with sugar and cinnamon]. It had to be sweet, with raisins. Or kneidlakh on Easter, that was my favorite, still is to this day, made from matzah flour. At that time matzah was different, not like today, from a factory, from Israel, square, made by machines, flat.

At home in Bodzentyn our neighbors used to make matzah. Usually they would do it at my parents', because there was a stove in the apartment. Everyone would pitch in. First, the apartment was cleaned, all the furniture, the walls were painted, the stove koshered – you'd put stones inside and then spray it with water. Then water was prepared. The water had to be clean; we would carry it from the spring. Then matzah would be made. Women from the villages would come, they'd be told how to do it. They were peasants, because it was hard work, kneading the dough by hand. They'd come if they wanted to and earn some money. Jews and Jewesses made matzah as well, but when there were more neighbors, more matzah was needed. The more people worked, the faster it all went. For example, you couldn't turn the matzah over. It had to be kneaded very thinly. There are recipes for this, kosher ones. I also kneaded. I even had two bumps [corns on hands] from this kneading, but I got 2 or 3 zloty a day for this work. Then you'd make lots of little

holes, so the dough wouldn't rise too much when it was being baked. And when everything was done, the neighbors came round to take their portions home.

We moved to Lodz in the spring of 1933. We moved away from poverty. There was no work in Bodzentyn. Wolf was the first one to leave, because he was the most efficient and he brought us down to Lodz. From that time on I didn't go to any school. I worked, mostly among Jews [Editor's note: Until WWII Lodz was Poland's second largest city, after Warsaw, and the city's Jews came to constitute the second largest Jewish community in Poland, after Warsaw. In 1938 it had a population of 665,000, of which 34 percent (223,000) were Jews. Many of the industrial enterprises were founded by Jews, and more than 50 percent of the Jewish population gained their livelihood from industry.]. Wherever you wanted to work, you worked for Jews. The first two weeks, I sold bagels, the kind with poppy seeds. I waited in the bakery, on Lagiewnicka Street, for all this to boil in a tub. Because these bagels were first boiled in a tub, they were boiling there, scalding. Next, they'd be taken out of the tub, poppy seeds were sprinkled on them and then they'd be put in the oven. They were so white and smelled so nicely, I remember that. Other boys used to wait with me, they had baskets. When the bagels were ready, each one would load as many bagels in the basket as he liked and go sell them in the city. Once you had sold everything, you'd come back for more.

Then I went to work in a store on 3 Nowomiejska Street. There was a tailor there, who made clothing for religious Jews. He made chalats [kippot], jackets, pants. I was there as an errand-boy. There were several tailors in the town, so I had to carry materials, sometimes the lining, sometimes accessories, from one tailor to the other. And so on, without a break. In the beginning I did this without using the tram. I walked at least 25 kilometers a day. I don't remember how much I got paid a week, but he took advantage of me without mercy. After all, there was a lot of unemployment, lots of people who wanted to work, so I didn't want him to take someone in my place. I don't know if I stayed there until 1934, I don't remember now.

Then one of my older brothers found me a place and I went to learn to sew on the overlock, as a knitter. I cut these thick knitwear materials that were later used to make women's underwear. I learned from the so-called marshal, who used to sing at Jewish weddings. His name was Ici Bucik. Bucik [Polish for 'little shoe'] was of course a pseudonym. His real last name was Nojfeld. He had this fat belly and a red beard. He took me in as an apprentice. I was supposed to learn for three years and I stayed for less than three months. I don't know why, but when Saturday came I took the keys to the workshop and I began taking the machines apart. I wanted to familiarize myself with this, because I got the knack for mechanics. I learned everything very quickly and I didn't have to study to be a knitter. I only got 50 grosze a week. I was friends with his son, Jakub.

In my free time I went to the cinema, or to dancing lessons. Right next to here [corner of Zachodnia and Zawadzka Streets] was Dembinski's dance hall. That's where everyone went to party. I went there as well, from time to time, with my friends. One Jew played his favorite songs there, sometimes quite funny, like that [Mr. Bromberg sang parts of the song]: 'Szloches gajt szojn ahaim...'. Szloches means slovens in Polish, because it was mostly servants who came there. 'Dos Gefes sztajt doch noch fon Szabes, zejn azejger macht men szojn cyj di tojeren..., ['Slovens, go home now. The dishes have been in the sink since Sabbath. The gates close at 10pm']. When he played his trumpet and sang this, we knew this melody, we knew it was time to get dressed and walk the girls home. Because those were different times. You wouldn't hold a woman by the neck, but you'd be elegant, super. And you'd always walk her from the dance floor to the place where

she was sitting; there were dances where you switched partners. Such youthful life.

Starting in 1933, because there were strikes often, I became involved in the trade union of textile workers and knitters. As a young boy I was very eager. I would go out looking for strike-breakers. I would sit down on the street with others and keep guard. If, during a strike, someone was transporting goods in a cart, then we had some ink in our pockets, or gasoline, and we'd throw this stuff on the strike-breaker's cart. I quickly found myself a new job, this time work by the piece. I got 25 grosze for a dozen of boys' underwear made on the overlock. It wasn't bad, but you had to make a lot of underwear! There were also these sets, brassieres and panties together, with buttons. Later I made underwear, knickers for women, then ladies' slips, because they were popular at the time. Every woman used to wear a slip.

Later I changed jobs. I changed every few months, because there were strikes. New strikes every few months. Because it often happened that the owners of a plant signed a contract with the workers, saying that they would pay 32 grosze a dozen. So they signed it, but when we came to work, they would say: 'Listen, I won't pay you 32 grosze a dozen, I'll pay you 25, if you want to work, you will, if not - then you have to look for work somewhere else.' They didn't push me as much like that, because I taught myself how to fix machines, as a mechanic.

People usually worked in the cottage industry. This was mostly on Nowowiejska Street. So when someone's machine broke down, he had to call a mechanic. The mechanic took the fee and sometimes pretended to work for several hours to earn it. I knew mechanics, so wherever I worked, they didn't have to hire any mechanics. I was a huge geroy [Russian, 'hero'], very important. When the employers found out I could fix machines, it paid off for them to employ me, even for a double wage. I mostly fixed sewing machines. When something broke down, I'd be there in a minute, do what was needed and then keep on sewing. There were many breaks, because there was more striking than working. There was the winter season and the summer season and then the war was drawing closer.

In the first years after we moved to Lodz, when I was already earning money, I began to sympathize with Poalei Zion Left. I was an activist, like my father. There were many [trade] unions at the time; the tailors had their union, the shoemakers had theirs; each profession had their union. When there were strikes, we went around the workshops looking for strike-breakers. Then there were political issues. There were communist Jews; bundists who were Jewish socialists belonged to the PPS [Polish Socialist Party] [11](#). They said that Jews should feel at home all over the world, in every country. Wherever they live, they have to fight for their rights. This Zionistic trend was created by a Zionist from Austria. Herzl [12](#) was his name. He was a philosopher, published books and said that each nation should have its own country. It's like this: when a dog has an owner, a doghouse, then when a stranger comes, the dog will raise its tail, bark, it won't be afraid. But when the dog doesn't have an owner, then it's enough to stomp your foot at it and it will run away at once.

Poalei was a workers' party. It was collecting money for buying land in Palestine. This was the so-called Keren Kayemet Leisrael [13](#). I didn't use to collect this money myself, but at home, although we were poor, there were several cans [for donations] next to the door. There was the Chachmej Lublin Yeshivah, a rabbinical college. So you'd throw 1 or 2 grosze into these cans every Friday. After two or three months someone would come, break the seals, collect the money, put the cans

back and so on.

In the same organization, Poalei, there was also a more right-wing branch, and then there was the leftist branch and I was in Poalei Zion Lewica ['left', Polish]. One time they even arrested me; I had such an incident. Before the war, they summoned me to the police station, on Kilinskiego Street, it was the political police. I was still a boy, I didn't know why and what for. I was afraid, because if someone was summoned there, nobody knew if he'd come back. The date was set two weeks later. So I went. Three of them were sitting at a table. They started interrogating me, fired lots of questions at me. Where I go, if I belong to the Party, where I work. Each one of them asked me questions, different ones, also political ones. And it was like this: this trade union of ours was on 57 Piotrkowska Street, on the third floor at the end of the hall. Because there were more leftists among us, we once organized an event on Lenin, Liebknecht [Liebknecht, Karl (1871-1919): German socialist leader and ideologue of the international workers' movement] and Luxemburg [14](#). It was a kind of political discussion. We prepared such events often, but usually they were official and registered. Everything had to be legal. I didn't even go to this event. It turned out it hadn't been legalized.

At the police station they showed me an invitation, written out in my name. 'Can you speak Yiddish?' 'Yes, I can.' They showed me a piece of paper, with other smaller pieces of paper stuck to it. They must have had some Jew in that police who could read. They showed it to me and asked me what it was. I had no reason to lie. I didn't even know what I was reading. So I finally told them that it was an invitation in my name, for such and such a meeting, but that I never received it. And that was the truth. It hadn't been delivered to me. When the police came in, then the person who had it in his pocket, must have torn it up, so they took all the little pieces and put them together and there must have been one who could decipher this writing. He pieced it all together and he got it. They had to let me go. I got away, I was pleased.

After we came to Lodz, we gradually stopped following traditions, especially after Mother died [1938]. She always felt hurt that her sons were moving away from religion, that they were not so superstitious [religious] anymore. She used to say: 'You won't even recite the Kaddish for me when I die.' When Mother died, we had the tombstone made, I was in mourning for 30 days, and I went to recite the Kaddish every day, in the synagogue on Baluty Market. I prayed and recited the Kaddish. Now, still, in spite of myself, although I don't really practice religion, when I go to Mother's grave I pray. I do it for her. To honor her memory. Although there should be ten people to pray, but I don't care about that. She wanted me to do it, so I do it. When she died, I said to myself that I would never in my life go to the theater. No theater, no parties, I promised myself and that was it. But when I was in Russia, in Siberia, I forgot and went once, and, well, then I started going again. I don't remember when exactly I stopped practicing religion, if there was a specific moment.

I just came to understand that God punishes sinners, but my mommy was a saint. If she was a Catholic today, then the pope would declare her a saint, like Mother Teresa. She had no sins whatsoever. I knew Mother, I know that. And the same was true for our entire family. No one ever stole anything from anyone else, not even a few grosze. My son, mean as he is, but if he knew that I owed 5 grosze at the store, he'd always remind me: 'Father, you were supposed to pay 5 grosze more yesterday.' During the war even children who had not sinned yet died. An adult could have sinned, committed adultery, stolen something, who knows what else, but children? An infant never sinned. Not like this prelate. [Editor's note: In 2004 the public prosecutor's office received

notification of a crime having been committed by prelate Henryk Jankowski, former kapelan of Solidarity [15](#), parish priest in Gdansk, who was accused of pedophilia, molesting minors.]. I don't like it, because he lives off of Jews, if it weren't for Jesus he'd starve, he'd be shoveling manure from some barn, and because of him he's made it. Such a bull. He seduced little girls, or boys.

The way it is with Jews, and I don't want to praise them because I'm a Jew and when they have some fault I talk about that as well, but with Jews there aren't any demi-gods, no paintings, none of that clothing. Just the tallit. It's like a fiancée. When a girl got engaged, she would sew a tallit for her husband. It's also called a shroud. [Although only married men have to wear the tallit, it is customary for men over the age of 13 to wear them. The tallit may be laid over the marriage canopy or be used as a burial shroud.] Because you keep it with you all your life and then you're buried in it. And the priests, they dress up, these colors, bishops, archbishops, parish priests. And what's the purpose?! After all they take it from the Jews! People believe in resurrection, that Jesus was resurrected. When you catch a fly and stick a pin through it, the blood goes out, then that's the end. You can't reverse it. That's how it is with people too. But a dogma is a dogma.

I envy those who believe, because they have a purpose, they don't worry about there being an end. They believe that that's just the beginning, that they will go to heaven. But where's heaven? It turns out I can't see heaven. Because if there is a galaxy, there are many satellites and planets, then where's heaven? What do they live from and what do they do in heaven? After all, if you go deeper into this, a wise man will be wary and an idiot will support what is written in the holy books, Christian texts. Each one [evangelist] wrote differently, however he understood it. I believed my sister never sinned, my mother never sinned, my brother never sinned. And where are they now?

Before a Jew became a rabbi, he had to fast, he didn't eat at all. He spent 24 hours a day, not just nights, but days and nights and studied that kaballah and other books, the Torah. Then, after he finished his studies he had the right qualifications, but he couldn't be a rabbi if he wasn't married. Everything has a purpose. If he has a wife, then he won't be unfaithful? He's a man, he's got needs as well. But in the Catholic faith you're not allowed to, you have to remain celibate. I knew some priests, I won't say who they were, who visited me. I set them up with women and they sinned. I even went on holidays together with priests dressed in lay clothing. That's hypocrisy. I don't believe in resurrection, of course I don't. I don't believe in heaven either. Where could all this fit? Six billion people. How would they make a living? Here brothers hate each other, a husband and wife can hate each other and in heaven they won't? I just think about this, I don't impose my ideas on anyone. Let them believe whatever they want to believe.

I once asked the rebbe: 'How was it when there was no earth, no heaven, no water, but there was God. So where was he? What was he created from? And it's written: let the earth separate from the water and from the heavens. Who was God speaking to and where was he? Even Adam wasn't there yet, Eve wasn't there. Who heard him? What language?' The rebbe used to somehow get rid of me. Same when I asked about Adam: 'He has three sons and they had no wife, so how could they have children?' Someone told me they had intercourse with monkeys, with damn monkeys. And the more I learned, the more I noticed that the pieces just didn't fit in. That's why there were kaballah books that you couldn't read unless you were a fundamentalist. Because you could stop believing. Damn, when I listen to the radio at night [Mr. Bromberg is referring to programs broadcast by Radio Maryja, a Catholic radio station operating since 1991. This radio station is known for anti-Semitic views.], I just get pissed off: 'Praised be Jesus Christ and Mary forever

virgin.' So how many more years will she be a virgin? She had children, a brother and they keep repeating idiotically: 'And Mary forever virgin.' You have to use your brain and not make a fool of yourself like that.

In 1933 [see Anti-Semitism in Poland in the 1930s] [16](#) the situation started getting worse. Anti-Semitism began in 1935, and got stronger in 1936. It happened that Jews were caught and their beards shaved off with blunt knives. And it hurt with a knife. And when 'Bij Zyda' ['Get the Jew'] began, Polish peasants wouldn't be allowed to enter Jewish stores. And Poles liked doing their shopping in Jewish stores. They bought on credit. Jewish stores were the cheapest. A Jew, when he was selling a pair of pants, wanted to make 50 grosze a pair. And this wasn't bad money. A quarter [250 ml] of vodka cost 50 grosze, five rolls - 10 grosze, six bagels - 10 grosze. He sold 100 pairs of pants and made a profit of 5 zloty. When a Pole got round to selling pants, he looked for some madman who'd pay him 5 zloty a pair. But it was worst when they formed this nationalist organization [see Endeks] [17](#). Then anti-Semitism spread faster. I know that one apprentice who was learning the trade at my father's, belonged to these nationalists. His name was Rubinkiewicz. They even killed one Jew, but that's a different story.

I remember the time when everybody was getting ready for war. I listened to this bandit Hitler speaking on the radio, shouting like some pig. There were many Germans in Lodz [approx. 65,000 Germans, amounting to 10 percent of the total population], Volksdeutsche [18](#). They usually worked as hosiers; they were in the textile industry. They later walked around in these Nazi uniforms, with the Hakenkreuz [swastika] on the left shoulder. They had their church on Limanowskiego Street. When it was Hitler's name-day, each German put his portrait in the store window. You could see it on Limanowskiego Street. Germans used to get along very well with Jews. Germans were artisans, manufacturers mostly, but they had good relations with others. When Hitler came to power, it all changed.

Just like in small towns, anti-Semitism was on the rise, peasants weren't allowed to enter Jewish stores and there was persecution in larger cities as well. There was a store called Chrzescijanski Dom ['Christian House', Polish] on 27 Zgierska [Street], on the Baluty market, next to the synagogue. And there was a sign on this store that said 'Don't buy from Jews' and all the merchandise they had was bought from Jews whom I knew. There were many stupid Polish peasants who thought that they would be patriots if they didn't buy from Jews, so they didn't. But when a peasant went to a Pole, he'd take him for a ride. As I said, a Pole couldn't do business, but he was jealous of others. That's when these animosities started, antagonisms.

So preparations for the war started. The Germans were getting ready to attack Poland. Some Volksdeutsche, they were mostly spying, were quietly informing them through some organizations what was happening in our country. And at that time, two years before the war, there were these affairs in the Sejm [Polish Parliament]. There was a woman representative named Prystor [see Prystor Decree] [19](#) and a priest named Trzeciak. So they started this affair on purpose, to distract everyone's attention from what was happening in the country. So in 1938 or 1937 this Prystor introduced a proposal to ban ritual slaughter. Ritual slaughter means that, before you eat fowl, if it's healthy, you take it to the shochet. He had a special knife and he killed these animals. With one stroke he'd cut the throat. [The method of slaughter is a quick, deep stroke across the throat with a perfectly sharp blade with no nicks or unevenness. This method is painless, causes unconsciousness within two seconds, and is widely recognized as the most humane method of

slaughter possible.] Then he'd wait for the blood to drain and good bye. And these representatives in the Sejm decided that you have to shoot an animal, because that's more humane. But it wasn't such an easy thing, because there were also Jewish representatives in the Sejm, so these discussions went on forever, about what is humane and what isn't. Jews would claim that if an animal was strong, for example a bull or a calf, then after the first shot it would go crazy and you had to shoot twice, three, several times before you killed the animal, so it suffered more. Jews claimed that if you cut the throat it all goes quicker. The blood is drained and that's it.

They'd keep on discussing these issues and meanwhile, the Germans were spying. They knew how many airplanes we had, how many soldiers, weapons. Hitler was sure he'd win. Shortly before the war, my oldest brother came back from the army; he was serving in the 51st Romanian King Charles' Regiment, in Poznan. He spent some months at home, but when the war broke out, he was mobilized again. But before that, before he was mobilized, different things were happening in Lodz; we didn't know what would happen next. Jews, Hasidim, bearded or not, they all volunteered for field work. I volunteered too. We dug ditches, on the old market square, ditches for protection against aircraft fire. Hitler was supposed to attack any day. There was this League of Anti-Aircraft Defense. I was a member of it. We'd go looking on rooftops with flashlights, supposedly looking for spies.

The war broke out on Friday, 1st September [see Invasion of Poland] [20](#). I was on 29 Mlynarska Street at that time. An alarm was announced 'Zora 32 is coming [code name], unhitch horses, get people inside, into shelters.' Not everyone was sure whether this alarm was the correct one, because there had been drills before; they were announced on the radio all the time. Lodz was attacked on Friday [8th September], I think a bomb was dropped on Krawiecka Street, I don't remember exactly. When it was dark, you couldn't leave your house, windows had to be covered. And that's when the Germans would attack. But it [29 Mlynarska Street] was my shift of the Defense League, so I was sleeping at my cousin's. I left the house looking for bread. You had to stand in line all night to buy some bread. If that wasn't enough, they'd also kick Jews out of the line. I was kicked out once or twice as well. But that night [the night of 6th September] I went out, I looked around and saw many of these horse-drawn carts on wheels. They were driving. I looked again and I saw it was our police. I was in precinct three [Editor's note: by precinct Mr. Bromberg means the district police station. He was not there himself; he refers to the police station which served his area]. So I see the police are driving, but at 12 at night? Where? They were going to Brzeziny [10 km from Lodz].

I went home early in the morning and I said to Father that the police were running away from Lodz, that I saw them leave. All the Jews started packing, because they had to run away, because the Germans were coming and they would kill all Jews. Very many Jews ran away then, mostly to Brzeziny. They only took their most valuable things. I didn't know if I should run away or not run away. Father had had gastrointestinal surgery; the family was large and poor. So we decided that we wouldn't run away. That's what we decided. Whatever would be, would be, but we were staying in Lodz. The Germans entered the city on Friday, the police ran away on Tuesday night and the Germans flew low above the ground and fired at everyone who was on the road to Brzeziny. Many Jews died at that time. Some had suitcases and gold, others had nothing. That was when we still said, 'Good for us that no one from our family ran away.'

Then there was anarchy in Lodz. The police had left. My third precinct, where I worked, left as well. Everything was nobody's. There were store robberies, muggings on the street, there was no government. It was terrible. I was afraid I'd get into trouble. On Friday morning you could hear the gunfire. When they started shooting, I hid in the doorways. I would stand there until they stopped shooting. When I was walking home to 76 Zgierska, from Lutomierska Street, there on that corner – the third precinct was on Koscielny Square – I noticed that there was a huge hole on the first floor; the bomb must have smashed right into the middle of the precinct. All the windows were broken. People were yelling to hang a white flag on the church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to show that we surrender. But in the end they didn't hang a flag. On Friday evening the German army entered the city. The Wehrmacht came in on motorcycles and tankettes [small tanks].

At first the Germans talked to us. In German, because it was similar to Yiddish. They talked and they didn't pay any attention – Jew or not Jew. Only with time did they start harassing and persecuting Jews. They would barge into an apartment, shout 'hands up!' and loot everything. No one was allowed out on the street, there was a curfew set for 5 o'clock. They started shaving the beards of Jews. I remember when they once caught one Jew in tallit, near Koscielny Square. They laughed at him and led him through the gutter like some animal.

Soon after they entered the city, the Germans started rounding up Jews for labor. They took them to Kruszyn [95 km from Lodz], to bury dead horses. The stink was unbearable there. Germans would beat up Jews there. Many Jews came back home maimed: without noses or ears. They caught me too. They took me to Lutomierska Street: there was an automobile station and these ditches where cars were fixed. I worked there, I had to clean these ditches, I took out the garbage and I managed somehow. I didn't get anything for this work. I later worked in some other places. When you went out on the street, you never knew if you'd come back. No one could be sure. That's why the Jews from the community promised they would provide 40,000 Jews, every day, for labor, if only the Germans stopped these round-ups. And so this supposed contract was signed [see Judenrat] [21](#). We gathered for work [forced labor] on Wschodnia, near Poludniowa Street. My brother's turn and mine came as well. Each one had a different assignment. The merchants came, these bandits [Germans] and chose those who were well suited for work. They knew, young or old, and they chose. They took me too. I was afraid at first, but later I arranged it with Jews who didn't want to go and I would go instead of them for 5 or 6 zloty. I worked under their name.

They once took me to Swietego Jerzego Street, the 10th Heavy Artillery Regiment was there. They took my neighbors with me. They took me to a shed, where there were lots of horseshoes. There was a railroad sidetrack nearby and they made horseshoes there, for horses. They took us all out into the yard, had us stand in a row. There was one German, maybe two. They approached each one of us. One took these scissors for cutting thick wires and went up to my neighbor, who used to sell bagels at the Fabryczny Train Station, he put his nose between the blades and waited. We were all pale, like millers. We all thought he'd cut our noses. But he only winked and nodded his head. Finally, he didn't do anything, only scared us. Then we had to go into a train which was full of horseshoes. Each one of us received these special hooks and we had to carry these horseshoes to the warehouse, 40 horseshoes at once. And this was quite a long way, to this train. I was sent behind the shed. There were crates with nails for horseshoes there. Those crates must have weighed some hundred kilograms each. There was no other way, at least two people were needed to lift one crate and I was alone. I couldn't say anything.

A German came, in work clothes, I remember he was wearing a leather apron. I was moaning and pretending to try to lift that crate. I was pushing this crate with the nails. He stood there, kept his hands under the apron and looked. I groaned even more, I was pretending, because I wouldn't have been able to lift it by myself anyway. He looked around, I was scared what would happen, but he took out a piece of bread and put it in my pocket, and went away. A second one came, brought two or three more people to help and we took this crate together and moved it where it was supposed to be moved.

Then there was lunch. They cooked in these mobile army kitchens. We didn't get anything. We were sent off; we had to walk around Jerzego Street until they'd stuffed themselves. They didn't give us anything; they didn't even let us in. After they had stuffed themselves, they called us, loaded us on the truck and took us to Wierzbowa Street. There were Polish army warehouses there, because it was the 10th Heavy Artillery Regiment. So we'd carry horse harnesses down, from the third floor to the trucks. One [Jew] even wanted to take something, but I told him not to do it, because if we got caught, we'd end up dead. When we had finished, they took us to Piotrkowska Street. The Germans called this street Adolf Hitler Strasse, because it was the longest street in Lodz. Jews weren't allowed to be there. I thought then - so we're not supposed to be here, but we are anyway. I went to work several times more. Even for money. I managed to do that. The Germans were doing street round-ups anyway, despite those 40,000 workers provided by the community. Then the years came when Jews had to wear armbands [22](#). Jews were still fooling themselves: 'The Germans have a pact with the Russians. Lodz will belong to the Russians' [see Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact] [23](#). Some started running away to Russia.

It was 1939. On 11th November the Germans burned down five synagogues in Lodz. They set fire to them. It was a Friday [Editors note: Saturday]. I was living close to Baluty market. Independence Day [holiday celebrating the regaining of independence by Poland after World War I, in 1918] had been cancelled. You could hear gunfire at night. It was said that the Russians were coming and we would surely be liberated the following day. In the morning a friend from the neighborhood runs in and says: 'Jakub, have you heard, the Germans hanged Jews on Baluty market'. 'Where?' 'Right here, get dressed.' One, two, three and off we went.

There were five or six of them hanging on gallows on the market. The synagogues were burning, no one was allowed to put out the fire. You know, when you hang a man, his tongue usually sticks out, they had their hands tied behind their backs, mouths closed and they were rocking slowly on those ropes. The Germans did this on a market day to scare away the Poles: 'be careful, if you try something, that's what's going to happen...'

My brother had a friend who lived nearby. He heard it when they brought these Jews. And saw it through the window. He said they were already dead. They were hanged dead. I stood there looking. Two Germans with guns were walking there. Suddenly some kid walked up to one German and said 'Jude, Jude, Jude' [German for 'Jew'] pointing at me. 'Komm her, Jude' [German for 'Come here, Jew']. He took me and two others. He led us through Zgierska, Nowomiejska, to Wolnosci Square. There were lots of people there. I was standing next to a sign that said 'Magistrate', where the Archeological Museum is currently located [present Wolnosci Square]. After the war you could still see that sign, but today you can't make it out. They put me there and gave a rope to each group. They took two Jews and asked them to climb a ladder, high enough to put the ropes around Kosciuszko's neck [the statue of Tadeusz Kosciuszko [24](#)]. This gunfire that we had heard at night:

we thought it was the Russians bombing, but it was the Germans shooting at the base of the monument. Because it was very heavy, they put dynamite there, but it still didn't fall. Then they caught some Jews, I don't know how many, 70, maybe 80 and ordered: 'Abschmeissen den Hund' [German for 'Get that dog down!']. They started to shout and we pulled him down.

I later read in German newspapers, and I liked reading, in Der Stuermer [German propaganda paper, published in Lodz during the war] or in Volkischer Beobachter [German paper, published in Lodz] that the Jews had pulled down and smashed the statue of Polish hero Tadeusz Kosciuszko. [The monument was pulled down by the Nazis in November 1939 and later rebuilt in 1960 by the same sculptor who had designed the original monument.] Some of the base was still there, but of course, during the war this square was empty. In 1945, on 19th January, when the Soviet forces were capturing the city of Lodz, 28 or 29 Soviet soldiers were buried there. Where the statue used to be. Not everybody knows that. 29 soldaty [Russian for 'soldiers'] like me, because I was in the Russian army as well. The first statue of Kosciuszko was made by Professor Mieczyslaw Lubelski. He was an architect; he lived in London. After the war they brought him back to Lodz, he had all the plans and he made another statue, identical with the first one. Residents of Lodz don't know, they don't remember, everyone thinks this was the first one.

Later many Jews ran away across the border. [Editor's note: in October, November 1939 many Jews ran away across the eastern border of Poland, to Russia. By March 1940, 70,000 Jews had left the city]. Some would come back to get their families. I had a friend on 44 Zgierska; he was a year or two older than me. His name was Wajnsztok. He ran away to Russia. He came back to get his sister and, finally, the entire family crossed the [river] Bug.

There was an argument at our house. Mother was dead by then, Father was sick, my brothers wanted to have nice clothes. Because they didn't want to wear these old rags, but creased pants. Hats, gaiters, gloves. Women had muffs, these nets over their eyes - veils, elegant, beautiful, not like today. No earrings, nose rings or navel rings. My brothers wanted to dress nicely and I wasn't working and so it began, one would say to the other, 'You, you should give some money for the house' and I didn't have any myself. Mother used to smooth things over. But then Mother was dead, Father was sick and so there was a lot of quarrelling at home. At that time, when my brothers were bugging me - I now regret this so much - I said these words, unintentionally: 'You're bugging me, but I will outlive you in the end...'

It hurt me that Mother was dead and that there were arguments at home. Finally, I had had enough. I heard that my friends were getting ready to run away. They also advised me to run away. I met with one of them and he said: 'Listen, we'll go to Malkinia.' [204 km east of Lodz] I was still a boy; I didn't know what it meant to go abroad. I thought this border was different. He explained to me all these train stations: 'Then you have to get off at the station, there will be railroad tracks there, follow the tracks uphill, there will be a white house there, and so on...' He explained, more or less, what it would be like. I got together with my friends, we started discussing. I told them we had to run away and that's it. It was 1939, or early 1940. The weather was beautiful, there was no snow yet. And we decided to run away. We met on 9 Solna Street, near Polnocna Street, at a friend's house. There were six of us and two or three girls.

I didn't say goodbye to my family, I didn't say goodbye at all. My family didn't know anything, only my sister and cousins. My sister cried, she asked me not to forget her. She was nine years old

when I saw her for the last time. I only stole a suit from my older brother – Wolf. A green one, thin. Used. I thought it would be necessary to bribe the customs officers. They all stayed in Lodz. Later, in 1940, they all moved back to Bodzentyn: Father with my brothers and my sister-in-law with her baby.

Why did I want to go? One of my friends had five brothers, they were all very strong, they lived on 42 Zgierska Street, they had a stall with soap. Their name was Waserman. One of them, when he came back from captivity – he was in the army and came back from the Germans – he said he saw a grave with my brother's name in Warsaw, on Grzybowska Street. My sister-in-law had a baby. She was alone with the baby. My brother didn't come back from the war. Some Jews, when they were coming back from camps in Germany, said they had also seen my brother's grave, a military grave with a helmet, in Grzybowski Garden. I didn't know Warsaw. I only knew I had a cousin there. Uncle's son lived there, on Hoza Street. I had known him ever since I was a child. He visited us, brought us chocolate. I decided to go there, without announcing myself first.

We decided to meet in the morning. I remember how one day I walked out on the street in the morning, maybe at 5am, I ripped off this armband, I stood on the sidewalk, looked around, to the east, west, north, south and I said in Yiddish: 'God, will I live, to walk on this sidewalk ever again?' I then went to Solna Street. From Solna we all went to Kaliski Train Station. It was raining, we were all wearing galoshes. Cargo trains were waiting at the station, packed, full, people like herrings, standing up. And lots of galoshes next to the cars. [It was very crowded inside, there were no steps, so people pulled one another up and the galoshes fell off their feet]. We finally managed to smuggle ourselves out of Lodz. Without tickets, illegally, because you weren't allowed to go anywhere. It took a long time. They locked us up in these cars. We couldn't turn around. It was too crowded. Normally the trip by train would have taken three hours. We had no breakfast, no lunch, nothing. Locked up in the car, at night, we finally reached the Central Train Station [in Warsaw] at five in the afternoon. The station had been burned down. I think there had been a fire.

When we went into the station, it was full of people. A kid was standing next to the entrance, like on Baluty market, and a German. This German was segregating people: Jew, Turk, Gypsy. When we entered, this kid started shouting 'Jude, Jude, Jude...' at us. The German, when he heard it, said 'Komm her' and had me come closer. Those [friends] had somehow disappeared. He went down with me, where the trains from Germany were arriving. He ordered me to unload them and then to load them with merchandise from Poland. I was dressed like this: six shirts, two suits, my brother's and mine, a jacket that my brother had once made, a short one made from an old coat and a nice coat, with thick lining – you can't find coats like these today, monogrammed and everything.

So I started unloading these cars. The German stood there, this tall brute with a gun and watched me. I was completely wet, sweating like a pig. I thought to myself, 'what's happening to my friends?' They stayed upstairs. And I was underground, so I told this German I was very hot and asked him if I could go upstairs, quickly change clothes and come back. 'You have five to ten minutes, but be back here immediately.' 'Of course I will.' So I jumped out, caught two boys [friends] and told them [what had happened]. Suddenly I saw this German on the stairs. He was a tall brute. He noticed I wasn't coming back, so he went to get me. There were lots of people, because it was a train station. He looked around. I saw him from a distance, but he didn't see me. When he was walking in my direction, I moved somewhere else and then again, so we played hide and seek. I finally lost him. Then the girls came to the train station. They ran away to the city when

the German took me and they were raped, captured by the Germans and raped. They came back crying and told us about it. I got up in the morning and went to my cousin's.

This visit was my first task. I sneaked out of the train station. It was raining. It was my first time in Warsaw, but I knew the address: 24 Hoza, corner of Krucza. A dark blue Polish policeman ['dark blue policemen' were Polish police officers working for the Germans] met me along the way. 'Hey mister, what are you doing?' He must have been a decent man, because he could have taken me to the Germans and that would have been it. 'Mister, it's after curfew, where are you going?' I was completely wet, all my shirts were soaked through. I reached Grzybowski Garden, but it was dark and I couldn't see anything. But I somehow found my way to my cousin's. I didn't know my cousin's wife at all. I don't think they had children. I told them what I was there for, that I was running away, that my sister-in-law had a baby, that she was waiting, that different people had come and said they had seen my brother in Germany, in Hanover, someone else said in Berlin. All this waiting and nothing came out of it. I didn't tell my sister-in-law before I ran away where I was going and why.

And then it was said that my brother had died as a soldier, that he had died in action. I told all this to my cousin and he said that yes, my brother had been there [at his house] recently, in army uniform, that he had dropped in when the Polish army was running away, wanted to borrow some civilian clothing. But this cousin didn't give it to him, 'I can't give it to you, because we're downtown, someone could notice that a soldier came in and a civilian walked out.' He simply got scared and my brother left with nothing. There was still some fighting in Warsaw and I found out that that was where my brother died, defending the citadel. But I asked my cousin, 'so where's the grave?' He said that he saw the helmet and it said Moszek Majer Bromberg on the grave. But it was said that some woman had come, dug the grave up [the grave was probably moved], so to this day I don't know what happened. So what did I think? I thought: I'll go to the community; perhaps they know something specific there.

The Jewish community in Warsaw was located on 26 Grzybowska Street, if I'm not mistaken. When I was walking there some Jewish muggers chased me, they wanted to snatch away my coat. And before the war there was this custom that before muggers took anything, they'd spit. This was on the street, close to Grzybowska: 'Hey you, who spit on you like that?' But I knew about this, because when I worked at the Hasidim clothing store [in Lodz], I saved my boss more than 100 meters of material. It was like this. My boss sent his brother to dekatyza [a place where fabrics were ironed with a hot iron, so the fabric would not shrink after being washed]. The brother was coming back to the workshop and someone spit on him. He put the fabric down on the road and wanted to wipe himself and this thief - caught the fabric and off he went.

I knew some thieves, because I was a busybody. How did I know them? Well, every Saturday, Sunday, a Pole with a mustache, a blonde man, with an umbrella, used to stand on the street next to Park Sledzia and sell caramel candy. For 5 grosze each. Every 100th or 500th piece of candy got a special prize, a box of chocolates. And these thieves, pickpockets, came there and stole from the players. I saw them sometimes. And once, I was walking home with my boss's brother, it was dark, there were no streetlamps like today. On the corner of Zgierska and Podrzeczna Streets, where Dyszkin [a famous Jewish store with kosher sausage] was, we saw a man standing in a lit window. He looked like the mugger who had stolen the fabric. So I asked: 'You! Isn't he the one who mugged you?' He said: 'Oh yes!' and ran to get a policeman. At the end they even got the fabric back. So when they wanted to spit on me in Warsaw, I knew what they were up to and didn't let

them.

So I kept walking, and I was about to enter the building, when I saw a round-up. The Germans are on the street and they're catching Jews. So I thought to myself, and that now they'd get me. But there were no Germans in the direction I was walking from, so I turned around on that street and scurried off. And that's why I never solved my brother's case, until today.

We [the group which ran away from Lodz] were all supposed to meet in Praga [district of Warsaw], on 39 Zamenhofa Street. That was the plan. I found this street. I found the apartment; I think it was on the fourth floor, very high up. They were already waiting for me. My sister-in-law's sister was running away from Lodz with me. Her last name was Goldsztajn, maiden name Szajewicz. She was supposed to marry my older brother. I gave her 70 zloty to hide. I had saved it earlier. Women used to wear belts with these steel or metal baleens. I put the money in these baleens. And I met with her at her brother-in-law's on 9 Mlynarska Street. From there we went to Dworzec Wschodni [Eastern Train Station]. We had arranged we would leave from there.

Some from our group ran away with others because the commotion was unbelievable. There was poverty. People were smuggling different things. You couldn't get into any car. They ran away, but they said we would meet at the train station in Malkinia. Malkinia, I knew where to get off. I stayed with my sister-in-law's sister, but she also got lost after a while, as women do. It was very crowded, I managed to get inside the car and she stayed behind. I was angry, why did I take a woman with me anyway? As a boy I was different than I am today, I could manage very well. Well, I managed to get on, so I stayed on. I didn't even notice when we crossed the Bug. Alone. [Editor's note: Mr. Bromberg suddenly remembers that, in fact, he was not alone, as it will be evident from the story below.] They weren't with me, she wasn't with me. We reached some place at night, people were shouting that there's a stop and getting off. 'What is this, is it Malkinia?', 'No.' That place was called Sadowne, it was on the other side of the Bug. I wanted to get off as well, but I really believe in destiny. I have struggled all my life, but somehow I manage to make it through every disaster. So I thought, where would I go if this wasn't Malkinia, 'Where's the train going next?', 'Next stop is Malkinia.' So I said I'd go to Malkinia. And I went to Malkinia.

I thought there'd be a large train station there, but it was dark, some shack made of planks, a house. So I shouted, I thought I'd find these friends. But there was no one there. Oh, I also took with me two of my friend Igiel's cousins. Their last name was Mehl. The younger one's first name was Mosze Baruch, he was a bit retarded. I don't remember the name of the older one. I was with them. When we got off the train it was dark. We entered some dark shack. People were talking to one another. They couldn't see each other. Boys from the countryside were sitting there with baskets of eggs, they were smuggling them to Warsaw and back. So I listened and they were talking about Jews in Polish, that Jews are hiding, that Jews in Bialystok [large city, 180 km from Warsaw, 293 km from Lodz] nail the tongues of Poles to tables. I couldn't speak Yiddish [there], so I moved closer to my friends and whispered in their ears that we'd better run.

I didn't speak Polish that badly, well, you could recognize the accent, that it was different, but not bad, but they had a bad accent. I didn't want them to speak up. Because I knew the way from my friend from Lodz, I knew that when you leave the station you have to go uphill, then there would be a white house, etc., so I whispered to them to be quiet and said we'd run away from this station. And those people kept talking about Jews. We were afraid that we'd be caught once daylight came.

We thought this wouldn't end well. I took one of them by the hand, he took his brother and we sneaked out, in the dark.

I could only feel where I was going, because we couldn't see one another. I jumped out of this station with them. I started thinking, 'railroad track'. I looked. There it was. Uphill. So we walked along this track uphill. I looked for this white house. It was starting to get light. We met a man, a railroad worker, a Pole, along the way. 'People, what are you doing here? Death penalty, bullet in your head, martial law, war and you're walking on the railroad tracks?' He was a good man, he showed us where there was a path. We kept walking, walking. They had luggage, I had luggage. There was some Pole in front of us. He's huffing and puffing, carrying bags, heavy bags. I said: 'You know, this must be a smuggler, let's get closer to him and help him carry it, you take one bag, I'll take the other.' And that's what we did. Faster, faster [we caught up with him], because he was walking slowly, his things were heavy. 'Mister, we'll help you, where are you from?', 'Oh, I'm so tired.' He had earlier smuggled some Jews, a rich Jew from Malkinia. 'And we want to get to the Soviet border. We lost a girl, we lost our friends. We're supposed to meet there. Where is this Soviet border?' He gave us these bags and we kept walking uphill. It was already daylight.

We reached some barn. He put it all down next to the barn and told us to wait for him. He went to get the Jews. I looked inside the bags. Beautiful shoes. They produced such shoes just before the war, they were called Dulboksy. High shoes, you could even wear them in the water; they were waterproof. I didn't have shoes. I had these old shoes for the summer, with holes. I only had these, because my good shoes had been stolen. If I had known then this Jew had such a mess in these bags I would have taken them. He himself didn't know what he was carrying in the bags. So we waited and waited with these bags. It could have been half an hour. He came back with another Pole. They told us to take everything and put it in that barn. I thought that for this help he'd tell us which way the border is, how to cross it illegally. I told him we wanted this information, but we didn't have any money, because we really didn't. I had 70 zloty in that belt of this sister-in-law, but I'd lost her. And this Pole refused. If we give him 20 zloty per person, he'll tell us. I said: 'Mister, at least tell me whether we should go east, or north, or south. Where?' The bastard wouldn't tell us. 'Mister, we helped you. We have no money, search us if you want to, we don't have anything.' He wouldn't, damn it, he just wouldn't. So I said - too bad. I didn't know how I knew what to do. We'd do it on our own.

We had already passed this white house. We walked and walked, on fields, footpaths, roads. We saw two women carrying something heavy. Who were they? A mother and a daughter. We were still thinking we were walking towards the border, that there would be Russians there, some gate, and they wouldn't want to let us through it, so we took these two women with us. We reached a forest, we entered the forest and there was a commotion there, lots of people, shouting. I thought, damn it, that's got to be the border there, there must be Germans there and the Jews are begging to be let through. That's how I imagined it. We looked and there were 20, maybe 30 Jews and two Poles making a deal, how much it would be per person. We separated from the women then. I thought there was no point in waiting for them [the smugglers]. I didn't have any money, it wouldn't have worked anyway.

I walked with those two brothers and we reached the end of the forest. There was a huge clearing and a large hill behind it. A wooded hill. I saw people running there normally. What happened? It turned out that was the neutral zone; we had left the Polish border behind us. And we hadn't met

any Germans! That's what destiny is. The neutral zone, it was so-called no man's land, a demarcation line. There were people lying there – women, children. They would lie there for many weeks, dying of hunger, cold, they couldn't get across the Soviet border. Whoever had money, bribed the forest rangers, the border patrol. There were two places where they let you through. Where we were, they [the Russians] were saying that they were all peddlers, bumpkins, so they didn't want them in. We sang the International [former USSR anthem; written in French by Eugene Pottier, a woodworker from Lille, after the fall of the Paris Commune of 1871, and set to music by P. Degeyter. It has been used across the world as a song of resistance to oppression.]. That's how we asked them to let us in. But we were hungry. I thought I'd sneak to a nearby village. I didn't manage to, the Russians caught us and sent us back to the neutral zone.

But hunger is hunger. I thought I'd try to sneak away again, this time alone. And I managed to reach the village: it was either Kanki or Pieczki. I met a Silesian in the forest, a German. So I thought that would be the end. But he was so good, he told me which peasant I should go to. I went there and it was the first time I had treyf borscht with pork fat. Until that time I never touched pork fat. That was my first food: greasy borscht with pork fat and potatoes. I bought four or five loaves of bread from the peasant. He baked them himself, large loaves, two and a half kilos each. And I went back to the forest. People, Jewesses and Jews kissed me. However much money I wanted [for the bread] they would have given it to me. I said I didn't want anything, just to keep one loaf for myself. I had something to eat with those brothers and everyone was satisfied. I managed to go to that peasant two or three more times.

Once I was walking in the woods again, going to the village and I saw some people running away between the trees. Damn it, I said, if they're afraid they have to be like me. So I went up closer, hid behind a tree and watched what was happening. There were three of them. They were curious who I was and I was curious who they were. It turned out they were smugglers, textile smugglers. They were smuggling underclothes from Warsaw to Bialystok. I spoke to them, told them I was in this zone and asked them to lead us to Bialystok. They agreed. They told me to go to a place at the edge of the forest once it started getting dark.

I went back, I didn't go to this village and said: 'Guys, pack everything and don't tell anything to anyone, we're leaving.' I don't know how it happened that I had such sense? I was like a commander, but why? I said: 'Tell them we're going to spend the night with the peasant I bring bread from, in that German village, that he has accommodation for us.' So the Jews were afraid: how could we go back to the Germans to the village? We went to that [meeting] place, the textile people were already there, it was still daylight. Dusk fell and one of them said 'Single file, boys, single file.' We finally managed to cross the border. We were lucky.

We reached a forest, another forest. It was dark, empty, you couldn't see anything. We didn't have any matches. 'OK boys, money' – the textile people said. 'Mister, but I told you the entire story. We don't have anything, not even something to eat. When we go to this address [in Bialystok] I will pay you' – I told them. They wouldn't listen to me. 'Kikes, give me money.' It was dark, they couldn't see me, I couldn't see them. Everything was dark. They started swearing, getting angry, walking around [between the trees]. I thought, it was bad, so I whispered to my friends in Yiddish: 'Don't say a word.' I grabbed one's hand, he grabbed the other's and we ran. And at night, in the forest, you couldn't see anything. 'Where are the kikes, where are the Jews?' They kept looking, feeling for us with their hands, walking, but they were getting farther away from us, instead of closer, while

we were quietly sitting under a tree.

When we couldn't hear them anymore, we walked away from those trees and entered the forest. We didn't have a compass, so we just kept walking, more or less forward. We heard a horse-drawn wagon in the morning: the wheels were creaking, they probably hadn't been oiled. I thought to myself that there had to be a road there. And it was a town called Koscielne Zareby [80 km from Bialystok], on the way to Bialystok. I recalled that there on the border zone they [Jews] were saying that the Russians catch Jews in Koscielne Zareby and return them to the Germans. So I said this was bad and we had to bypass this city, walk around it. We walked all night. I was cold, freezing, my pants were wet, but we walked around the city. We left Koscielne Zareby behind us. We reached Czyzew [63 km from Bialystok]. And there was a train there, lots of Jews, a megaphone was playing, you could hear singing in Russian. I bought the first loaf of bread there. It was hot, warm, a large loaf of bread. I scarfed it down, pardon my language, without butter, just tore it apart. You couldn't get on the train later, because it was so packed. People were sitting on the steps, on the roof. And it was wintertime, the wind was blowing, it was cold. I finally somehow made it to Bialystok.

We found out there was a prayer house in Bialystok, opposite the Orthodox church, on Sosnowa Street and that's where Jews were staying. It was such a destitute place. They served free food there, soup three times a day. We entered, rested, and had our first soup. We slept on the floor. Sometimes it was raining, sometimes snowing, but we fought for the place on the floor. Women and men slept together. Bugs started showing up. I later learned there was a second synagogue on 32 Sienkiewicza and that the conditions there were better. I went there. The Russians were riding on horseback on the streets, playing the harmonica 'Shiroka strana moya rodnaya' and so on. A different life. I could feel this freedom, that I had finally made it to paradise.

I went to the synagogue and that's where I found my sister-in-law's sister, Lola. She told me she had been on the same train from Warsaw as I, but in a different car. She got off in Sadowno. The Germans were catching Jews there. There was a massacre. The Germans cut off Jews' noses and ears. She somehow survived; it was a miracle. And she went to the toilet and gave me the money back. We were in that synagogue together for some time. It was crowded as well: men, women sleeping on the floors, on benches, such a mess. But what was I supposed to do? Wander around? It was winter.

Someone advised me then that it's good to live in Hrodna [80 km from Bialystok, in today's Belarus]. Because Jews were very bad in Bialystok. They wouldn't let any Jews, runaways into their houses. They called us 'biezeniec' [from the Russian word 'bezhenetz', refugee] - runaway. Sometimes, when they couldn't pronounce this word properly they'd say 'abeznik' or 'berznik'. They said that we were all thieves, that decent people wouldn't run away, only prostitutes and thieves. The Germans surely can't be that bad, they can't be doing what we're saying they're doing. And they sold us grain coffee for 20 grosze a cup. They sold us the coffee on the street; they wouldn't let us into their houses. They made a bad name for themselves, those Jews from Bialystok, very bad. When someone had a daughter and she was supposed to get married and her father or mother wanted to punish her, they'd shout: 'Even a berznik won't take you for a wife'. Even a berznik. It meant that we were the worst. Those weren't humans there in Bialystok; they felt no sympathy for us. We cursed them: 'if only you live to go through what we have been through.' They didn't want to believe us. [Editor's note: this attitude of disbelief was typical of Poles and Jews

living in territories occupied by the Soviets.]

I went to Hrodna by train. It was really different there. We lived in synagogues in Hrodna. There were beautiful benches there, polished and shiny, and each one had their own place. Frost, snow, it was really cold. The synagogue was on 7 Najdusa Street, next to a restaurant. They started giving us lunches there, for vouchers. I forged these vouchers, I mean I changed the dates, and that way I had two or three lunches a day. One day the director caught me and said: 'Because you forge the vouchers so well, you should get another lunch.' We were working then: we went to clean the railroad tracks from the snow. We did this for money. My feet were always wet, because of these holes in my shoes, because when there was a snowstorm everything would get wet easily. There was also a baker next to the synagogue and he used to bring us bread and hot tea. I met a friend there, the one who guided his sister and parents [across the border] and gave me tips. I met him in Hrodna. But he must be dead by now, because he was two or three years older than me.

The Russians came later and, supposedly, took us to Siberia for one year. They bought us, like human traffickers. They told us they were taking us to Siberia, to some town there, that it would be light work, that the machines would do all the work, that the pay would be good. And they took us there in cargo trains. 400 people went there. It took us, I think, 32 days to get there. The first days there we would go to the bathhouse, because we all had lice. Then they taught us safety and work hygiene for several days. They gave us advances for buying food. Some took them and ran away. Mostly those were Jews from Warsaw, Lodz and communists. They stole some blankets, took their advances and ran away. I think 300 people ran away and 100 of us, dumb as we were, stayed. They gave us a place to sleep in buildings called 'obshcheye zhizn' - common, shared life.

Then work began. Some stayed on the surface, they didn't make much money, but I was in the 10th 'oddzielenie' [department], where the gases were. There were the most accidents there, but you could earn good money. Because this was a gas mine, 1,437 meters, in the district Novosibirskaya Oblast, city of Andzero-Suldzenks, Kirov mine 5-7. [Editor's note: no city under this name exists, but it is impossible to find out, where Mr. Bromberg had been]. Those were two twin cities. I worked in Suldzenks and some worked in Andzersk, that's why Andzero-Suldzensk. Then they moved me to a coal mine. I worked there from 9th February 1940 until 12th April 1941. First I was the head miner's helper, the foreman's. I shoveled coal. Then they issued me a certificate and I became the miner's helper. I worked in this position for a long time, but at the end, they moved me to supplying shores, so there'd be no risk of everything collapsing. I worked, but not full time - it was supposed to be six hours, but you had to work for twelve. Later we went on strike, because they didn't want to dismiss us.

They promised us we would work for about eleven months and then each one could start working in his profession. They told us that they had greeted us with music and that they'd also part with us with music [colloquial for a warm welcome]. And when the time came, they told us 'not yet.' They still didn't have miners. They scared us that there'd be a war, that we should stay and work one month longer. So we agreed to stay for a month. But when the situation repeated itself, we didn't go out to work. Persecutions began. After these strikes they sent some off to see polar bears [idiomatic expression for deporting someone to Siberia], they locked some up in jail, they had cases in court, some were arrested at once, without a hearing, others were sent home. Several others and I were conscripted into the army.

I served in the Soviet Army, in the 720th Riflemen's Regiment. I was in Slovyansk [750 km from Moscow]. I served there from 1941 until 1944. In the meantime I was transferred to the Engineer-Sapper Battalions. I served there from 1942 until the end of 1944. We built railroad tracks, anti-tanks devices, that is ditches, tracks, bridges. We were mostly near Stalingrad. Then the war broke out [see Great Patriotic War] [25](#). We were on maneuvers, in Lubny [700 km from Moscow]. It was a miracle that I survived the war. I was wounded. I was dismissed around 1944. I wanted to go home. I knew my family had no idea where I was. After all, I hadn't said goodbye to anyone.

I first went to Lwow [today Ukraine], then from Lublin to Warsaw and Lodz. That worked out well. I came back to the same place, with a gun in my hand. My dream was to show up like Joseph in Egypt, who came back although everyone thought he had died. I didn't want to go straight to Lodz. I could have made it to Lodz on 19th January [1945] with the Red Army, because I was in uniform. But I didn't want to; I instinctively felt that no one was alive. I spent some months in Lublin and I came here. I thought I'd meet someone. I was disappointed. No brothers, no friends, no father, no mother, no sister, no cousins. No one was left. They all died. I searched, but I wasn't successful. I even visited the ghetto [Lodz Ghetto] [26](#). There on Lagiewnicka Street [in Nacha and Monka Wajntraubs' apartment], I found some letters, photos, documents and that was all. I only managed to find a few of my acquaintances.

In 1957 I went to Bodzentyn. I was hiding first, after I arrived. I didn't want to say that I was a Jew. After the war there was this incident with one Jew, who had a store next to the seminary. He had been in Auschwitz, and survived. Noach Binsztok was his name. When he was liberated he went to see his house and store and the Poles killed him. [Editor's note: it is impossible to locate any sources confirming this story. However, there were many such incidents, which went undocumented, but people know and talk about them.] So I was afraid to say this, I was simply afraid. I went to Bodzentyn, because I had a house there. I was thinking of getting it back, but I didn't. There was this old woman living there. She's probably been dead for a long time now. And she was there, because of prescription. [Editor's note: after World War II the state assigned vacant apartments and houses to citizens in need of housing, without regard to the property's legal ownership status, this practice was called prescription.] I didn't want to move her, so I decided to leave the house alone. I came back to get the birth certificates, all the documents that everyone's dead, death certificates and all that, I had to arrange it.

I didn't say anything to anyone. I slept near the cemetery. There was this old woman there, a widow, Jacwiong was her name. She let me sleep on straw for 15 zloty. I spent the night, got out in the morning. I didn't want to say anything then. I started to gradually recognize the neighbors, Poles, because there were no Jews left by then. No one recognized me. I was wearing a normal hat. I don't have a hooked nose. Finally I revealed who I was. After half an hour the entire town knew that Josek's son had come back. And Josek was god for them. So when I came to Bodzentyn I saw that everyone was very glad to see me and I started remembering where everything was. I sniffed around there, where my family had lived before the occupation.

I met my future wife's brother in Lublin. His name was Mietek Kalisz. I spent some time in Lublin before I came to Lodz. I lent him some money, because I had money. He was a shirker [he didn't want to work], a happy-go-lucky fellow. He couldn't write. When someone confided in him, he would give him everything he had. He was never rolling in dough. He later went to Lodz. I met him at the Jewish Committee in Lodz [which served as a kind of Jewish community, Jews returning to

Lodz reported there]. He said: 'Why did you spend so much time in Lublin?' He asked where I lived. And when I came back I first lived at the Red Cross, on Sienkiewicza Street, and then I moved in with one Jew. He lived alone, on 72 Wschodnia. Borower or Badower was his name, I don't remember exactly. Mietek finally invited me to his place: 'Come, I live on Prochnika Street.' I went and that's how I met my future wife.

Her name was Frymeta Kalisz, Frania. She was born in 1922. She came from Brzeziny near Lodz [21 km from Lodz]. She wasn't educated; she had just finished two grades of public school. According to the Jewish custom we were married on Tuesday, 14th August 1945. [Editor's note: for much of Jewish history, the third day of the week (Tuesday) was considered an especially auspicious day for a wedding, because, concerning the account of the third day of creation, the phrase '... and God saw that it was good' (Genesis 1:10,12) appears twice.] We married in Lodz. I didn't want to get married, but she blew me away. We had only known each other for a few months, but I loved her. And I was no carefree fellow. We lived in that apartment on 21 Prochnika Street. My son was born one year after we got married. But she didn't want to have a baby. She had come back from the camp and she said she didn't want to have children. That's why she tried to poison him until the 7th month of pregnancy: with infusions and all these other devils, contraception. But he was fully grown by then. I loved my son and I said I wanted him.

If I had known how it would all work out, I would have left her immediately. She didn't want to listen to me, she kept repeating that she'd survived the ghetto, camps and that she didn't want children. She was crazy about this. Constant arguments. And there was a doctor living downstairs in our building. A Jew. His name was, just like my grandmother's - Golebiewski. He was a gynecologist. He saw patients in his apartment and that's where he performed abortions. I sometimes saw it from the bedroom window, how women went to see him. I went there too. I met him and I paid him, I don't remember if that was weekly or monthly, so that my wife wouldn't miscarry, to keep the pregnancy. She didn't know about this, I didn't tell her.

That's how it was with my wife. She didn't want to know what the next day would bring. And I said that we should think about the future, that I didn't know if I'd have a job, if I'd be healthy. No, she only lived for today, because tomorrow the world might collapse. And there were conflicts already. When I wanted to buy her some present, she didn't need it. 'So hang yourself today if you don't need anything. Take some rope and hang yourself.' I wanted her to have two pairs of shoes, winter shoes and summer shoes, but she didn't want those either. Nothing. But later, when she started needing things, I'd get headaches from that. She had different advisors. I could fend for myself very well, I made money, I worked in Zalberg's textile workshop on 13 Zeromskiego Street. When people went on holiday, I worked. On Sundays, when they went to the park, I was sitting and working. And that was the story. I had different problems with her, I avoid talking about it, because it still hurts. Anyway, I got divorced in 1952. I didn't care where she went. She later had two more daughters. She lived near the Czech border, and later she left for Israel. The court gave me full custody of our son and I raised him myself. I didn't even take child support from her.

Although my son's mother didn't want him, his weight at birth was three and a half kilograms. What a boy. Only girls were being born in that clinic and, after two weeks of only girls, he was the first boy. He was born in a private clinic. The clinic was on 32 Glowna Street; the building isn't there anymore. I was insured, but I preferred for my wife to be comfortable. [Editor's note: Polish public health care system, free of charge for those who had insurance was not of a high standard.]

My son wasn't raised in a traditional way, like I was. He went to a public Jewish school in Lodz. It was the Peretz school. It was located on 13 Wieckowskiego. It was a Jewish school, but they taught in Polish. They only taught Yiddish twice a week. So my son could write, but he didn't understand Yiddish. Anyway, I spoke Polish with him at home. There was no cheder then. There were communists here, no one taught religion. Anyway, I never taught him that, as a Jew, he should be better than his friends. I didn't teach him hatred, but tolerance: there's a good Jew and a bad Jew, a good Pole and a good German. My son didn't belong to any organizations, only to the Youth Cultural Center. [Editor's note: After World War II the authorities instituted a system of Cultural Centers located throughout the country. These centers, especially prominent in small villages, promoted art and culture among local residents by organizing all kinds of events and free-time activities.] After he graduated from elementary school, he kept studying at an electronics school in Lodz. I got him into that school, I mean I arranged his admission, without exams.

One time I was coming home, I noticed lots of neighbors in front of the house. 'Mister, where were you?' 'What happened?' It turned out that he was shouting that they're beating daddy. He had opened the window and shouted: 'They're beating daddy, beating daddy, they'll kill him, they're beating him!' When I came in, he said that it was only a dream. He opened the window and shouted into the backyard. But, other than the fact that he was growing up too fast, I am still looking for what I did wrong raising him. And I think, perhaps it was because she poisoned him? He didn't take all of my genes. He'd never apologize for anything. But I loved him so much. We slept in the same room. I was the one who bathed him, I washed his clothes, took him to all these theaters. When he was leaving for summer camp, I'd see him off. I took him to school on my bicycle. I picked him up from school. We used to ride on the motorcycle everywhere. I thought I had a genius at home. A talented, beautiful boy.

There was this situation: when my son had friends they were usually Polish, they picked on him and called him a Jew, so he went to Wolnosci Square, to the church: to complain to the priest that they're calling him that. He just forgot himself.

In 1962 they kidnapped him from the house. There was this communist organization. They hit my soft spot, because I was criticizing them for doing repulsive things. They dragged him out of school, they hid him in an old folks' home [in Lodz]. He was out of the house for three and a half years, from 1962 to 1965. Finally, they arranged for him to go to see his mother, to Israel. She knew she had a son, he was a good-looking boy, handsome. He left for Israel, joined the army, as a recruit. He fought in two wars. He survived. He was supposed to fight in a third one, but he somehow managed not to. He later ran away to America [USA].

He married and had two children. With Jews it can't be that the same name is used twice in one house. The father can't have the same name as the son. So while we are alive we dream of progeny for our name. [Editor's note: one of the most common practices of the Jewish religion is to name a child to honor a relative. Sephardim name their children freely after both living and deceased relatives. However, Ashkenazim rarely name children after living relatives.] She's from those dark Jews, Sephardim, and they don't name children after their ancestors. We, Ashkenazim name children only after relatives who have died. Everyone dreams of having a successor, of being replaced by someone.

He can write beautiful letters. He's got style. I don't. He begged me for forgiveness. I was moved, because I knew what he had been through there and with me.

When the first Israeli war broke out, when Jews won it within six days and conquered all those Arab countries, he fought in this war. He even sent me a Hebrew newspaper, I remember only the Polish version of the title, which was 'Szanuj jedyna pamiatke' - 'Respect Your Only Keepsake'. There were pictures of him at the front. I am still surprised that this newspaper ever made it to me. The relations between Poland and Israel were very bad at that time. Poles were friends with Arabs. I showed this newspaper at work. I showed it, because it was said that Jews shoot onions from a crooked barrel. That's what Poles thought: that Jews are cowards. 'Jojne karabin' [crooked barrel], that's how the saying used to go. I showed them: 'See, this is my son, these are the generals, General Dayan, here are the Arabs, you could see everyone there, and tanks too. [Dayan, Moshe (1915-1981): Israeli general and politician; Israeli defense minister 1967-1974; directed Israeli forces in the Six-Day-War in 1967 and the Yom Kippur War in 1973; Israeli foreign minister 1977-1979.]

So they, my best friends from work, they reported on me, saying that my son was beating up the poor Arabs in Israel, that I was a Zionist, that they didn't want a Jew - a Zionist to be working with them. I later found out who wrote this. And they didn't have the right to fire me. I never served time [in jail], I had an excellent opinion, I was a veteran. In order for them to lay me off, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs would have needed to issue permission. And it would have needed to be some major offence for him [the minister] to do so. And yet, they fired me. And they didn't explain this decision. They fired me without notice. I wrote to Warsaw that I wanted to know what the reason was. They didn't write back to me to tell me what the reason was. So I wrote them that the reason was that I was Jewish. The chairman of my housing cooperative asked me why I wasn't going to Israel. I said I'd go when I wanted to go. They chased me away: 'No, go now, because you won't be eating Polish bread here anymore.' And I answered: 'Not bread, but rolls, chocolate. I'll drink vodka and champagne!' I had some ambition. I showed them I'd leave when I wanted to, not when someone wanted me to. There were also some decent fellows there, at work. They told me about everything. They laughed: 'You've fired the best employee and now he's not working, but getting a pension', because I immediately received a disability pension. I had health issues related to the war and the mine.

I didn't remarry, because I didn't want my son to have a stepmother: because she could have hit him, there could have been problems. My goal was to raise him until he was 18, then look for some nice gal and start my life over. I dreamed of having seven children. For us seven is the lucky number. But I was disappointed, my life was broken; his [the son's] is broken as well. My son's children are someplace else, they don't write.

Also, my son is in one place and the children in another [the children live with their mother in Israel]. Their Jewish parents were too soft on them. They didn't ask to be called father, mother, but only used their first names. I wanted to be called Grandpa, Grandpa Jakub and not Jaakov. How can a young person be an old one's buddy? A 90-year-old lady and some kid are on a tram and he says 'you' to her, he doesn't get up, he laughs. When this happens to me, I approach this guy, take out my veterans' identity card and ask to check his ticket; they are afraid of that.

After the war I was still a leftist. I didn't belong to any organization, only to the war veterans. I didn't want to have any position. When they wanted me, they promoted me. When I came to Lublin, when Lodz hadn't been liberated yet, that's when they started. They were looking for people from the army, who were in the Red Army. They were getting them ready for diplomatic school. I admit, they were mostly looking for Jews. They didn't trust Poles, because there were these partisans: NSZ [National Armed Forces] [29](#) and AK [Home Army] [30](#). And you know what I did? I was born in 1919, so I changed the 9 in my papers into a 3, so that I was supposedly born in 1913. And then I was too old for this. I didn't want to have any governmental position, although there were cases when a private would be immediately promoted to lieutenant, major, whatever. But I'm not the kind of person who would want to benefit from someone's misfortune. So I never belonged to any party, I didn't join anything, not even the Jewish community.

I'm not suited to capitalism. I don't like this banditry, this gluttony. During the PRL [Polish People's Republic, 1945-1989] I had a job. I sometimes worked at home, and I worked in the factory. When the controllers came I showed them that I worked, that I had a wife and a child and that I was earning money. Grosze.

I remember well the fall of communism in 1989 [see Poland 1989] [31](#). I listen today how they praise Walesa [32](#) in that Ukraine. And who was he? He jumped a fence. He's rolling in dough now and he's set his buddies up as well. There are things which no one likes. If things stay the way they are, there'll be a revolution. This capitalism is banditry. The rich ones control everything: ironworks, whatever, brother to brother, friend to friend, selling everything; they're selling out the entire country. The Jew doesn't have a good life. Especially after 1989 it changed for the worse for me. I used to be able to make some extra money, as a mechanic, or somehow from the cooperative. Now they've taken everything away from me. Balcerowicz [Minister of Finances in the government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki] said [in 1990] that two years later he'd even it out for everyone. That it would be paradise later. That we'd only have to struggle to make ends meet for the first two years. And it turned out to be bullshit. Money stops being money.

We used to have discounts, now they've taken everything away. And it keeps getting worse. Rents are going up, now they're going to raise them again in January. I don't have a bathroom, I don't have central heating. Is this a system? This is banditry. Even under communism, when I was working I said that I was a religious Jew and wouldn't work on Saturdays. And now? It's banditry, not capitalism. I listen to how it is with Ukraine [see Orange Revolution, 2004] [33](#), that they're all great Poles now, going crazy in Poznan, Cracow for this Ukraine. And when the Ukrainians were murdering us? I know something about this, because I was living together with them. They stick their noses into Israeli issues, they used to do it with Arabs, now they're doing it with Ukraine. They want to have this whorehouse, pardon my language, in Ukraine.

And now, what kind of a country is this Poland? One affair after another. I go to the doctor, because I am entitled to this, I have a referral to the hospital, even two referrals and they tell me: 'Go back to the out-patient clinic.' Under communism women whose husbands worked were at home. They also worked, after they came back home: in the cottage industry, making handkerchiefs for someone. Everyone would do that. You'd always make some money for light or electricity. I fixed machines: sometimes for free, sometimes for grosze, but I didn't take any money from friends. And now it has all lost its value. We can throw away the machines. Lodz was a city, which exported textiles, textile products to all of Russia and all over the world. There used to be so many factories

and where are they now? Where are the chimneys? Now all there is left is broken windows. They're looting, destroying. There is no cottage industry, there's nothing. It's all over. [Editor's note: indeed, many factories closed down after 1989. Lodz is one of the cities with the highest rate of unemployment.]

My life was my schooling. I toughened in the army and in the mines. I wear the star of David on the lapel, on purpose. Everybody knows me. At the Grand [Grand Hotel in Lodz, on Piotrkowska Street] and at other hotels. They have respect for me. When they want to find out where some street used to be, they call me. Nobody offends me and if there is such a person, I give him a lesson, so he won't think I'm a 'jojne karabin' that shoots onions from a crooked barrel. I like to joke, I'm not backwards. Some Jews are like that: that when someone tells a joke, a Jewish joke, they feel offended. I see that the joke is a joke. I'm tolerant.

Anti-Semitism? I hear about this prelate scoundrel [priest Henryk Jankowski] [34](#) that Jews are everywhere, that all of Poland is full of Jews: Jews in the government, in courts, and Jews are [blamed for] all bad things. There are no Jews in Poland. [The total population in Poland is about 39 million. The actual number of Jews is estimated between 5 and 10,000.] Poles are now turning themselves into Jews. Jews are in fashion. I have lots of magazines, anti-Semitic ones and others. I collect them, keep them. Opinions about Jedwabne [35](#). And I even know Jedwabne better. I don't want to reveal this, but there was one more murder in Bodzentyn.

When a person is open, then I explain everything, I'm friendly, but when I see that nothing will help, then there is this saying: 'You can't make a fox hat for a pig's tail.' You can't. This is translated from Yiddish. When someone's a boor, you can explain all you want, but you can't convince him, he won't change his mind. When I see someone is a fanatic, a Jew-eater, that nothing I say, no explanations can reach him, I stop speaking to him. I walk on the other side of the street and I pretend I'm looking at the building, some façade. I pretend that I don't see him, so I don't even have to say 'Good morning' to him and so that he doesn't greet me. Today it's the same with Jews. When I don't get on well with someone, I prefer to be alone. If I can only have false friends, I prefer not to have friends at all. I have known many of these. I can tell a friend from an enemy. I talk to Germans. They visit me, they call, send me books. Why am I supposed to take revenge on these young Germans who hadn't even been born or were children, because the grandfather or father was a bandit? If he's showing remorse and suffering for this, then I can't take revenge on him. Perhaps I should be able to, after all, I lost everyone: no one's left from Mother's or from Father's side. But I can't.

There was a time when I wanted to emigrate, like others. That was when they they were harassing me, when they fired me from work [1968]. They were distributing Jewish apartments then. Giving them to repatriates from Russia. 'Zabużanie' [inhabitants of the eastern bank of the River Bug, Polish], they sent in those from the other side of the Bug. One of them came to me as well. He was allotted my apartment, so I was supposed to move out. I was outraged, because I had painted the floors, the walls, everything was elegant. I didn't know I'd have to leave. So they sent for me from Warsaw, took away my passport, gave me two months to run away and a travel card. I thought to myself: 'I'm a Polish citizen, I won't sign anything, I won't give up what's mine. Perhaps I'll leave some day, but when I want to do so.' So I told this blockhead who came here to take over my apartment that the toilet is downstairs and that he could live there. And I stayed. That's fate. Now I don't move anywhere. At my age I'm barely alive. I don't know if I'll come back from hospital. Not

to mention traveling. Anyway, I deeply believe in destiny. It must have been my destiny. 'Where you head is to lie, there your legs want to go.'

My life is very bad now. I'm alone. Drugs are expensive, everything is expensive. They won't admit you to hospital. The doctor doesn't care about the patient. You have to bribe him, and where am I to get the money? I live off my pension. I sometimes show tourists around: when someone comes, I show them around. Some want to see the ghetto, because it has changed, some the statue of Moses [on Wolborska Street]. And I also have the pleasure of looking for members of different families. I reunite families. I search to find out if someone is still alive somewhere. People pass on such knowledge. I do too. I look for someone through someone else, because perhaps someone knows something. I have reunited several families. I once met a professor, who said that his mother had come here. He didn't know anything about his sister, only that she had got lost. 'Your sister is alive, she's a professor in New Zealand.' 'What does she look like?' I said: 'Stocky built, of medium height.' 'How old?' 'Approximately 60.' He started crying on the street. 'That's my sister', 'I thought she died in Auschwitz', 'No, she's alive.' And I gave him her address.

My friends have died. They used to visit me, the director, the manager and the workers [from the many textile workshops Mr. Bromberg was employed in]. We used to meet up. I would invite them and they would invite me. Now I lie here and think: Frank is gone, Staszek is gone, Wojtek is gone, and this one is gone... It's the same with Jews. There are only [a few] individuals left. Those who were in the ghetto were a bit mixed up. I'm not surprised. Perhaps if I had survived what they had been through, I would have gone crazy as well, or wouldn't be alive at all. So I'm not surprised. We don't have a common language with those from the ghetto.

I'm still alive thanks to the country of Israel. Everyone can live wherever he wants to, that's a fact. But when Jews regained their country - although it's still not certain what will happen in the future - then I felt better. Because other countries already have respect for that nation. I know that although I'm here in Poland, if something bad happens, someone in Israel will stand up for me. They would provide accommodation and money for living. Poland used to be partitioned as well, before it became independent. Even if the country is poor, it's good that it exists. I remember the great joy after the Six-Day-War. The country that was threatening to push us into the sea, got whipped.

Something unfortunate happened to me in the summer. When they were putting up these statues [statue of three factory owners from Lodz: Schaibler, Grohman and Poznanski] I went there. I fell. I lost consciousness. I lost my teeth, my jaw was broken. I was taken to hospital. For seven or eight minutes I was there, at Saint Peter's. I didn't know I have acute anemia. I still haven't completely recovered. Getting worse, getting worse. Sometimes my leg hurts, sometimes my hearing fails, especially after this accident. I have problems with my teeth too. They've fallen out, and they're supposed to pull out more. My teeth hurt, perhaps that's where all these illnesses come from.

I listen to the radio, because I don't have a TV at home. I would go crazy without my radio. I even used to listen to Israeli radio stations, now I mostly listen to RMF FM [a commercial radio station created in 1990. The station plays popular pop and rock music, mostly current hits. It is well known for professional and up-to-date news services.] I'm asleep and the radio is playing next to me. When I know someone will visit, I turn it off, because when the door is locked in the winter, then I can't hear the doorbell.

I read a lot. I have these different magazines: Wprost [a popular Polish social-political weekly, published since 1982, with right-wing conservative sympathies], Newsweek [American social-political weekly magazine. Published in Poland as Newsweek Polska], Angora [a weekly digest publishing a selection of articles from Polish and foreign monthlies], Forum [a weekly magazine, review of articles from foreign press (e.g. The Guardian, Die Zeit, La Republica, Le Figaro) translated into Polish], Polityka [the leading weekly magazine in Poland, published since 1957. Politically, the magazine has a centrist orientation] and other Lodz journals. I also read Jewish [magazines], Midrasz [a Jewish social-cultural monthly magazine, published in Polish, dealing with the life of Jews in Poland and abroad and with other ethnic minorities in Poland. Midrasz publishes essays, religious commentaries, literary texts, reportages. The first issue of Midrasz came out in 1997], Slowo Zydowskie [Dos Yidishe Wort] [36](#).

I have lots of problems. I don't go to the community. Only for soup. My neighbor finances this. He also told me I should go, not be ashamed, but take it. So I take it, because I won't cook now. These lunches have really gotten worse recently. Really bad.

Now everyone has some entertainment: televisions and all these different games. At my house, it's like a cemetery. I only keep listening to the radio. I stay at home all day long, like in some prison. I've been through so much in the army and in the mines. I managed to survive each misfortune, pull through. My entire life was tough. My plans were never realized. That's why I don't plan anything; I arrange things at the last minute. I don't want to break my word, and for me a promise is worth more than money. Siberia, mines, army, poverty, lack of food. And so my story keeps going.

Glossary:

### **[1](#) Asch, Sholem (1880-1957)**

novelist and dramatist, who wrote in Yiddish, Hebrew, English and German. He was born in Kutno, Poland, into an Orthodox family. He received a traditional religious education, and in other fields he was self-taught. In 1914 he emigrated to the United States. Towards the end of his life he lived in Israel. He died in London. His literary debut came in 1900 with his story 'Moyshele'. His best known plays include 'Got fun Nekomeh' (The God of Vengeance, 1906), 'Kiddush ha-Shem' (1919), and the comedies 'Yihus' (Origin, 1909), and 'Motke the Thief' (1916). He wrote a trilogy about the founders of Christianity: 'Der Man fun Netseres' (1943; The Nazarene, 1939), The Apostle (1943), and Mary (1949).

### **[2](#) Sholem Aleichem (pen name of Shalom Rabinovich (1859-1916))**

Yiddish author and humorist, a prolific writer of novels, stories, feuilletons, critical reviews, and poem in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. He also contributed regularly to Yiddish dailies and weeklies. In his writings he described the life of Jews in Russia, creating a gallery of bright characters. His creative work is an alloy of humor and lyricism, accurate psychological and details of everyday life. He founded a literary Yiddish annual called Di Yidishe Folksbibliotek (The Popular Jewish Library), with which he wanted to raise the despised Yiddish literature from its mean status and at the same time to fight authors of trash literature, who dragged Yiddish literature to the lowest popular level. The first volume was a turning point in the history of modern Yiddish literature. Sholem Aleichem

died in New York in 1916. His popularity increased beyond the Yiddish-speaking public after his death. Some of his writings have been translated into most European languages and his plays and dramatic versions of his stories have been performed in many countries. The dramatic version of *Tevey the Dairyman* became an international hit as a musical (*Fiddler on the Roof*) in the 1960s.

### **3 Der Moment**

daily newspaper published in Warsaw from 1910-39 by Yidishe Folkspartei in Poyln. It was one of the most widely read Jewish daily papers in Poland, published in Yiddish with a circulation of 100,000 copies.

### **4 Treblinka**

village in Poland's Mazovia region, site of two camps. The first was a penal labor camp, established in 1941 and operating until 1944. The second, known as Treblinka II, functioned in the period 1942-43 and was a death camp. Prisoners in the former worked in Treblinka II. In the second camp a ramp and a mock-up of a railway station were built, which prevented the victims from realizing what awaited them until just in front of the entrance to the gas chamber. The camp covered an area of 13.5 hectares. It was bounded by a 3-m high barbed wire fence interwoven densely with pine branches to screen what was going on inside. The whole process of exterminating a transport from arrival in the camp to removal of the corpses from the gas chamber took around 2 hours. Several transports arrived daily. In the 13 months of the extermination camp's existence the Germans gassed some 750,000-800,000 Jews. Those taken to Treblinka included Warsaw Jews during the Grossaktion [great liquidation campaign] in the Warsaw ghetto in the summer of 1942. As well as Polish Jews, Jews from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, France, Greece, Yugoslavia and the USSR were also killed in Treblinka. In the spring of 1943 the Germans gradually began to liquidate the camp. On 2 August 1943 an uprising broke out there with the aim of enabling some 200 people to escape. The majority died.

### **5 Rashi**

Full name: Rabbi Shlomo Yitzaki (1040-1105). He was one of the greatest Bible scholars in Jewish history. His commentaries on the Torah and the Talmud are indispensable for those interested in studying Jewish literature. He was born in Troyes (France), and studied in the two famous yeshivot of the time, in Mainz and Worms. In 1070 he founded a school that made France the center of rabbinic sciences for a very long period. This school gave room, among others, to his sons-in-law and grandsons, who were also renowned Bible scholars and founded the Tosaphist School, and their commentaries are an organic part of any Talmud edition today. Rashi wrote commentaries on almost every scripture book, and commented almost the entire Babylonian Talmud. His commentaries had such importance that the first book printed in Hebrew was made on basis of these commentaries. And the letters used for this purpose have been called Rashi letters since then. According to tradition, he died while writing the word 'tavor' (pure) in the commentary he was writing on the Talmud Makkot tractate. He died on 29th Tammuz; the location of his grave is unknown.

### **6 Hasidism (Hasidic)**

Jewish mystic movement founded in the 18th century that reacted against Talmudic learning and maintained that God's presence was in all of one's surroundings and that one should serve God in one's every deed and word. The movement provided spiritual hope and uplifted the common people. There were large branches of Hasidic movements and schools throughout Eastern Europe before World War II, each following the teachings of famous scholars and thinkers. Most had their own customs, rituals and life styles. Today there are substantial Hasidic communities in New York, London, Israel and Antwerp.

## **7 Bund**

The short name of the General Jewish Union of Working People in Lithuania, Poland and Russia, Bund means Union in Yiddish). The Bund was a social democratic organization representing Jewish craftsmen from the Western areas of the Russian Empire. It was founded in Vilnius in 1897. In 1906 it joined the autonomous fraction of the Russian Social Democratic Working Party and took up a Menshevist position. After the Revolution of 1917 the organization split: one part was anti-Soviet power, while the other remained in the Bolsheviks' Russian Communist Party. In 1921 the Bund dissolved itself in the USSR, but continued to exist in other countries.

## **8 Poalei Zion (the Jewish Social-Democratic Workers' Party Workers of Zion)**

in Yiddish 'Yidishe Socialistish-Demokratishe Arbeiter Partei Poale Syon'. A political party formed in 1905 in the Kingdom of Poland, and operating throughout the Polish state from 1918. The party's main aim was to create an independent socialist Jewish state in Palestine. In the short term, Poalei Zion postulated cultural and national autonomy for the Jews in Poland, and improved labor and living conditions of Jewish hired laborers. In 1920, during a conference in Vienna, the party split, forming the Right Poalei Zion (the Jewish Socialist Workers' Party Workers of Zion), which became part of the Socialist Workers' International and the World Zionist Organization, and the Left Po'alei Zion (the Jewish Social-Democratic Workers' Party Workers of Zion), the radical minority, which sympathized with the Bolsheviks. The Left Poalei Zion placed more emphasis on socialist postulates. Key activists: I. Schiper (Right PZ), L. Holenderski, I. Lew (Left PZ); paper: Arbeiter Welt. Both fractions had their own youth organizations: Right PZ: Dror and Freiheit; Left PZ – Jugnt. Left PZ was weaker than Right PZ; only towards the end of the 1930s did it start to form coalitions with other socialist and Zionist parties. In 1937 Left PZ joined the World Zionist Organization. During World War II both fractions were active in underground politics and the resistance movement in the ghettos, in particular the youth organizations. After 1945 both parties joined the Central Jewish Committee in Poland. In 1947 they reunited to form the strongest legally active Jewish party in Poland (with 20,000 members). In 1950 Poalei Zion was dissolved by the communist authorities.

## **9 Nachalnik, Urke (1897-1939)**

born as Icek Farberowicz, the son of a wealthy merchant, he was supposed to become a rabbi. He left home at a young age and became a thief and robber. He spent 15 years and three months in prisons - Russian, German and Polish. While in prison he learned to read and write Polish, got in touch with Melchior Wankowicz - well-known writer and journalist and founder of the publishing house 'Roj'; and eventually published numerous novels, short stories, essays and autobiographies in both Polish and Yiddish (also in American newspapers). In the 1930s he got married and turned into a well-respected citizen of Otwock, near Warsaw. He was caught in underground activities

against the Nazis and killed.

#### **10 Beilis, Menachem Mendel (1874-1934)**

Jewish merchant charged in 1911 in Kiev with ritual murder. The trial dragged on for almost 2 years and was accompanied by an anti-Semitic campaign. The Beilis case shocked international public opinion and provoked protests from Jewish centers and progressive social circles the world over. Not until the boy's murderess confessed was Beilis acquitted. This was the last trial on a charge of ritual murder in the world.

#### **11 Polish Socialist Party (PPS), founded in 1892, its reach extended throughout the Kingdom of Poland and abroad, and it proclaimed slogans advocating the reclamation by Poland of its sovereignty**

It was a party that comprised many currents and had room for activists of varied views and from a range of social backgrounds. During the revolutionary period in 1905-07 it was one of the key political forces; it directed strikes, organized labor unions, and conducted armed campaigns. It was also during this period that it developed into a party of mass reach (towards the end of 1906 it had some 55,000 members). After 1918 the PPS came out in support of the parliamentary system, and advocated the need to ensure that Poland guaranteed of freedom and civil rights, division of the churches (religious communities) and the state, and territorial and cultural autonomy for ethnic minorities; and it defended the rights of hired laborers. The PPS supported the policy of the head of state, Jozef Pilsudski. It had seats in the first government of the Republic, but from 1921 was in opposition. In 1918-30 the main opponents of the PPS were the National Democrats [ND] and the communist movement. In the 1930s the state authorities' repression of PPS activists and the reduced activity of working-class and intellectual political circles eroded the power of the PPS (in 1933 it numbered barely 15,000 members) and caused the radicalization of some of its leaders and party members. During World War II the PPS was formally dissolved, and some of its leaders created the Polish Socialist Party - Liberty, Equality, Independence (PPS-WRN), which was a member of the coalition supporting the Polish government in exile and the institutions of the Polish Underground State. In 1946-48 many members of PPS-WRN left the country or were arrested and sentenced in political trials. In December 1948 PPS activists collaborating with the PPR consented to the two parties merging on the PPR's terms. In 1987 the PPS resumed its activities. The party currently numbers a few thousand members.

#### **12 Herzl, Theodor (1860-1904)**

Jewish journalist and writer, the founder of modern political Zionism. Born in Budapest, Hungary, Herzl settled in Vienna, Austria, where he received legal education. However, he devoted himself to journalism and literature. He was a correspondent for the 'Neue Freie Presse', the well known Viennese liberal newspaper, in Paris between 1891-1895. In his articles he closely followed French society and politics at the time of the Dreyfuss affair, which made him interested in his Jewishness and in the fate of Jews. From 1896, when the English translation of his 'Judenstaat' (The Jewish State) appeared, his career and reputation changed. He became the founder and one of the most indefatigable promoters of modern political Zionism. In addition to his literary activity for the cause of Zionism, he traveled all over Europe to meet and negotiate with politicians, public figures and monarchs. He set up the First Zionist World Congress (Basle, 1897) and was active in organizing

several subsequent ones.

### **13 Keren Kayemet Leisrael (K**

**K.L.):** Jewish National Fund (JNF) founded in 1901 at the Fifth Zionist Congress in Basel. From its inception, the JNF was charged with the task of fundraising in Jewish communities for the purpose of purchasing land in the Land of Israel to create a homeland for the Jewish people. After 1948 the fund was used to improve and afforest the territories gained. Every Jewish family that wished to help the cause had a JNF money box, called the 'blue box'. In Poland the JNF was active in two periods, 1919-1939 and 1945-1950. In preparing its colonization campaign, Keren Kayemet le-Israël collaborated with the Jewish Agency and Keren Hayesod.

### **14 Luxemburg, Rosa (1871-1919)**

German revolutionary and one of the founders of the Polish Socialist Party (1892). She moved to Germany in 1898 and was a leader in the German Social Democratic Party. She participated in the Revolution of 1905 in Russian Poland and was active in the Second International. She was one of the founders of the German Communist Party and she also edited its organ, Rote Fahne. Critical of Lenin in his triumph, she foresaw his dictatorship over the proletariat becoming permanent. She was murdered in prison in Berlin.

### **15 Solidarity (NSZZ Solidarnosc)**

a social and political movement in Poland that opposed the authority of the PZPR. In its institutional form - the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarity (NSZZ Solidarnosc) - it emerged in August and September 1980 as a product of the turbulent national strikes. In that period trade union organization were being formed in all national enterprises and institutions; in all some 9-10 million people joined NSZZ Solidarnosc. Solidarity formulated a program of introducing fundamental changes to the system in Poland, and sought the fulfillment of its postulates by exerting various forms of pressure on the authorities: pickets in industrial enterprises and public buildings, street demonstrations, negotiations and propaganda. It was outlawed in 1982 following the introduction of Martial Law (on 13 December 1981), and until 1989 remained an underground organization, adopting the strategy of gradually building an alternative society and over time creating social institutions that would be independent of the PZPR (the long march). Solidarity was the most important opposition group that influenced the changes in the Polish political system in 1989.

### **16 Anti-Semitism in Poland in the 1930s**

From 1935-39 the activities of Polish anti-Semitic propaganda intensified. The Sejm introduced barriers to ritual slaughter, restrictions of Jews' access to education and certain professions. Nationalistic factions postulated the removal of Jews from political, social and cultural life, and agitated for economic boycotts to persuade all the country's Jews to emigrate. Nationalist activists took up posts outside Jewish shops and stalls, attempting to prevent Poles from patronizing them. Such campaigns were often combined with damage and looting of shops and beatings, sometimes with fatal consequences. From June 1935 until 1937 there were over a dozen pogroms, the most publicized of which was the pogrom in Przytyk in 1936. The Catholic Church also contributed to the

rise of anti-Semitism.

## **17 Endeks**

Name formed from the initials of a right-wing party active in Poland during the inter-war period (ND – ‘en-de’). Narodowa Demokracja [National Democracy] was founded by Roman Dmowski. Its members and supporters, known as ‘Endeks’, often held anti-Semitic views.

## **18 Volksdeutscher**

In Poland a person who was entered (usually voluntarily, more rarely compulsorily) on a list of people of ethnic German origin during the German occupation was called Volksdeutscher and had various privileges in the occupied territories.

## **19 Prystor Decree**

In pre-war Poland the issue of ritual slaughter (Heb. shechitah) was at the heart of a deep conflict between the Jewish community and Polish nationalist groups, which in 1936-1938 attempted to outlaw or restrict the practice of shechitah in the Sejm, the Polish parliament, citing humanitarian grounds and competition for Catholic butchers. In 1936 Janina Prystor, a deputy to the Sejm (and wife of Aleksander Prystor (1874-1941), Polish prime minister 1931-1933), proposed a ban on shechitah, citing principles of Christian morality. This move had an overtly economic aim, which was to destroy the Jewish meat industry, which meant competition for Christian butchers. Prystor met with fierce resistance among Jewish circles in the Sejm. In the wake of a debate in the Sejm the government decided on a compromise, permitting shechitah only in areas where Jews made up more than 3% of the local population.

## **20 Invasion of Poland**

The German attack of Poland on 1st September 1939 is widely considered the date in the West for the start of World War II. After having gained both Austria and the Bohemian and Moravian parts of Czechoslovakia, Hitler was confident that he could acquire Poland without having to fight Britain and France. (To eliminate the possibility of the Soviet Union fighting if Poland were attacked, Hitler made a pact with the Soviet Union, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.) On the morning of 1st September 1939, German troops entered Poland. The German air attack hit so quickly that most of Poland’s air force was destroyed while still on the ground. To hinder Polish mobilization, the Germans bombed bridges and roads. Groups of marching soldiers were machine-gunned from the air, and they also aimed at civilians. On 1st September, the beginning of the attack, Great Britain and France sent Hitler an ultimatum - withdraw German forces from Poland or Great Britain and France would go to war against Germany. On 3rd September, with Germany’s forces penetrating deeper into Poland, Great Britain and France both declared war on Germany.

## **21 Judenrat**

German for ‘Jewish council’. Administrative bodies the Germans ordered Jews to form in each ghetto in General Government (Nazi-occupied colony in the central part of Poland). These bodies were responsible for local government in the ghetto, and stood between the Nazis and the ghetto

population. They were generally composed of leaders of the Jewish community. They were forced by the Nazis to provide Jews for use as slave laborers, and to assist in the deportation of Jews to extermination camps during the Holocaust.

## **22 Armbands**

From the beginning of the occupation, the German authorities issued all kinds of decrees discriminating against the civilian population, in particular the Jews. On 1st December 1939 the Germans ordered all Jews over the age of 12 to wear a distinguishing emblem. In Warsaw it was a white armband with a blue star of David, to be worn on the right sleeve of the outer garment. In some towns Jews were forced to sew yellow stars onto their clothes. Not wearing the armband was punishable – initially with a beating, later with a fine or imprisonment, and from 15th October 1941 with the death penalty (decree issued by Governor Hans Frank).

## **23 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact**

Non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which became known under the name of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Engaged in a border war with Japan in the Far East and fearing the German advance in the west, the Soviet government began secret negotiations for a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939. In August 1939 it suddenly announced the conclusion of a Soviet-German agreement of friendship and non-aggression. The Pact contained a secret clause providing for the partition of Poland and for Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.

## **24 Kosciuszko, Tadeusz (1746-1817)**

general, Polish national hero. Born in Poland, studied military engineering in Paris and later moved to America, where he joined the colonial army. Gained fame during the American Revolution for his fortifications and battle skills, especially during the siege of Saratoga. Returned to Poland in 1784. In 1794 he led a rebellion against occupying Russian and Prussian forces, known as the Kosciuszko Uprising (Powstanie Kosciuszkowskie). Jailed in Russia from 1794 to 1796, later left for France, where he continued efforts to secure Polish independence.

## **25 Great Patriotic War**

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

## **26 Lodz Ghetto**

It was set up in February 1940 in the former Jewish quarter on the northern outskirts of the city. 164,000 Jews from Lodz were packed together in a 4 sq. km. area. In 1941 and 1942, 38,500 more

Jews were deported to the ghetto. In November 1941, 5,000 Roma were also deported to the ghetto from Burgenland province, Austria. The Jewish self-government, led by Mordechai Rumkowski, sought to make the ghetto as productive as possible and to put as many inmates to work as he could. But not even this could prevent overcrowding and hunger or improve the inhuman living conditions. As a result of epidemics, shortages of fuel and food and insufficient sanitary conditions, about 43,500 people (21% of all the residents of the ghetto) died of undernourishment, cold and illness. The others were transported to death camps; only a very small number of them survived.

## **27 Six-Day-War**

The first strikes of the Six-Day-War happened on 5th June 1967 by the Israeli Air Force. The entire war only lasted 132 hours and 30 minutes. The fighting on the Egyptian side only lasted four days, while fighting on the Jordanian side lasted three. Despite the short length of the war, this was one of the most dramatic and devastating wars ever fought between Israel and all of the Arab nations. This war resulted in a depression that lasted for many years after it ended. The Six-Day-War increased tension between the Arab nations and the Western World because of the change in mentalities and political orientations of the Arab nations.

## **28 Yom Kippur War**

The Arab-Israeli War of 1973, also known as the Yom Kippur War or the Ramadan War, was a war between Israel on one side and Egypt and Syria on the other side. It was the fourth major military confrontation between Israel and the Arab states. The war lasted for three weeks: it started on 6th October 1973 and ended on 22nd October on the Syrian front and on 26th October on the Egyptian front.

## **29 National Armed Forces (NSZ)**

a conspiratorial military organization founded in Poland in 1942. The main goal of the NSZ was to fight for the independence of Poland and new western borders along the Oder-Neisse line. The NSZ's program stressed nationalism, rejected fascism and communism, and propounded the creation of a Catholic Polish State. The NSZ program was strongly anti-Semitic. In October 1943 the NSZ had some 72,500 members. The NSZ was preparing for an armed uprising, assuming that the Red Army would occupy all the Polish lands. It provided support for military intelligence, conducted supply campaigns, freed prisoners, and engaged in armed combat with divisions of the People's Army and Soviet partisans. NSZ divisions (approx. 2,000 soldiers) took part in the Warsaw Uprising. In November 1944 a part of the NSZ was transformed into the National Military Union (NZW), which was active underground in late 1945/early 1946 (scores of divisions numbering 2,000-4,000 soldiers), fighting the NKVD, UB (Security Bureau) task forces, and divisions of the UPA. In 1947 most of its cells were smashed, although some groups remained underground until the mid-1950s.

## **30 Home Army (Armia Krajowa - AK)**

conspiratorial military organization, part of the Polish armed forces operating within Polish territory (within pre-1 September 1939 borders) during World War II. Created on 14 February 1942, subordinate to the Supreme Commander and the Polish Government in Exile. Its mission was to

regain Poland's sovereignty through armed combat and inciting to a national uprising. In 1943 the AK had over 300,000 members. AK units organized diversion, sabotage, revenge and partisan campaigns. Its military intelligence was highly successful. On 19th January 1945 the AK was disbanded on the order of its commander, but some of its members continued their independence activities throughout 1945-47. In 1944-45 tens of thousands of AK soldiers were exiled and interned in the USSR, in places such as Ryazan, Borovichi and Ostashkov. Soldiers of the AK continued to suffer repression in Poland until 1956; many were sentenced to death or long-term imprisonment on trumped-up charges.

### **31 Poland 1989**

In 1989 the communist regime in Poland finally collapsed and the process of forming a multiparty, pluralistic, democratic political system and introducing a capitalist economy began. Communist policy and the deepening economic crisis since the early 1980s had caused increasing social discontent and weariness and the radicalization of moods among Solidarity activists (Solidarity: a trade union that developed into a political party and played a key role in overthrowing communism). On 13th December 1981 the PZPR (Polish United Worker's Party) had introduced martial law (lifted on 22 June 1983). Growing economic difficulties, social moods and the strength of the opposition persuaded the national authorities to begin gradually liberalizing the political system. Changes in the USSR also influenced the policy of the PZPR. A series of strikes in April-May and August 1988, and demonstrations in many towns and cities forced the authorities to seek a compromise with the opposition. After a few months of meetings and consultations Round Table negotiations took place (6 Feb.-5 Apr. 1989) with the participation of Solidarity activists (Lech Walesa) and the democratic opposition (Bronislaw Geremek, Jacek Kuron, Tadeusz Mazowiecki). The resolutions it passed signaled the end of the PZPR's monopoly on power and cleared the way for the overthrow of the system. In parliamentary elections (4th June 1989) the PZPR and its subordinate political groups suffered defeat. In fall 1989 a program of fundamental economic, social and ownership transformations was drawn up and in Jan. 1990 the PZPR dissolved.

### **32 Walesa, Lech (1943)**

Leader of the Solidarity movement, politician, Nobel-prize winner. Originally he worked as an electrician in the Gdansk shipyard and became a main organizer of strikes there that gradually became nation-wide strikes and greatly influenced Polish politics in the 1980s. He was a co-founder of the Solidarity (Solidarnosc) trade union in 1980, representing the workers (and later much of the Polish society) against the communist nomenclature. He was one of the promoters of the thorough reconstruction of the Polish political and economic system, the creation of a sovereign democratic state with a market economy. In 1983 he received the Nobel Peace Prize. From 1990-1995 he was president of the Republic of Poland.

### **33 Orange Revolution 2004**

the events which took place in Ukraine between 21st November 2004 and 23rd January 2005, connected with presidential elections. The candidates for the presidency were: prime minister Viktor Yanukovich, backed by the government and the candidate of the oppositional party Our Ukraine, former prime minister Viktor Yushchenko. The name Orange Revolution comes from the orange color which represented the electoral campaign of Viktor Yushchenko. Since the inception

of demonstrations in Kiev, Ukraine was supported in its desire for democracy by Poland.

### **34 Jankowski, Henryk**

Catholic parish priest of St. Bridget Church in Gdansk until November 2004. He became famous by **openly expressing his anti-Semitic view and staging shocking projects such as the use of anti-Semitic slogans as Easter decoration in church. Charged with pedophilia and embezzlement of church property, his activities greatly attracted the attention of Polish media.**

### **35 Jedwabne**

town in north-eastern Poland. On 10th July 1941 900 Jews were burned alive there. Until recently the official historiography maintained that the Germans were the perpetrators of this act. In 2000, however, Tomasz Gross published a book called Neighbors, in which he indicted Poles as the perpetrators of the Jedwabne massacre. This book sparked off a discussion that embroiled academics, politicians and the media alike. The case was also investigated by the Institute for National Remembrance. This was the second such serious debate on Polish involvement in the extermination of the Jews. The Jedwabne debate attempted to establish the number of Jews murdered, to define the nature of the incident (pogrom or Holocaust), and to point out the direct perpetrators and initiators of the crime.

### **36 Dos Yidishe Wort**

bilingual Jewish magazine that has been published in Warsaw every other week since 1992. The articles deal with the activities of the Jewish community in Poland as well as with current affairs. In addition there are reprints of articles from the Jewish press abroad.